

COOPERATING WITH THE HEAVENLY MINISTRY OF THE ASCENDED CHRIST

(Lord's Day—First Morning Session)

Message Seven

Practicing the Church Life under the Ministry of Christ as the Minister of the True, the Heavenly, Tabernacle

Scripture Reading: Heb. 8:2, 6; 2:10-12; 1:9; 3:6; 4:9; 7:22; 9:15; 12:22-24, 28; 13:1-19

I. The ascended Christ is a “Minister of the holy places, even of the true tabernacle”—Heb. 8:2:

- A. Christ, as a Minister of the true (heavenly) tabernacle, ministers heaven (which is not only a place but also a condition of life) into us.
- B. The present Christ, who is now in the heavens as our Minister, is ministering to us the heavenly life, grace, authority, and power and sustaining us to live a heavenly life on earth as He did when He was here—1:3; 4:14; 7:26; 9:24.
- C. The heavenly Christ is ministering in the tabernacle “which the Lord pitched, not man”—8:2:
 1. This tabernacle, this sanctuary, is in the third heaven, in which is the heavenly Holy of Holies.
 2. The heavenly Holy of Holies, where Christ is ministering on our behalf, is connected to our spirit—4:12.
 3. Christ's ministry in the heavens takes care of our needs—v. 15:
 - a. From the heavens Christ ministers Himself to us as food, as our life supply, in the way of dispensing.
 - b. As our Minister takes care of our needs, He carries out God's economy—Eph. 1:10.
- D. Whatever Christ carries out as the heavenly Minister, He applies to us as the Spirit—1 Cor. 15:45b; 2 Cor. 3:17:
 1. The supply we need comes from the Christ who is both the Lord in the heavens and the Spirit within us—Acts 2:36; Rom. 8:11.
 2. Now we may experience Him in all His functions as the ascended One—Heb. 1:3; 9:24; 12:2.
 3. As the heavenly Minister, He transmits what we need from God the Father, who is the source, into our spirit to supply and sustain us.
- E. In His heavenly ministry as the Minister of the true tabernacle, Christ is serving God's people with the bequests, the blessings, of the new testament—7:22; 8:6; 9:15:
 1. As our heavenly Minister with a more excellent ministry, Christ is carrying out the better covenant—7:22:
 - a. He does this by making the facts of the new covenant effective.
 - b. Every fact in the new covenant is made effective by the heavenly Minister with His more excellent ministry—9:15; 8:6.
 2. Whatever is a fact in the new covenant is a bequest in the new testament;

Christ, the heavenly Minister, is executing the bequests in the new testament—9:15-17; 10:16-18.

II. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, various aspects of the church are revealed:

- A. The church is a living composition of the many sons of God, who are the many brothers of Christ brought forth in His resurrection—2:10-12; Rom. 8:29; John 20:17; Heb. 1:5; 5:5; Acts 13:33; 1 Pet. 1:3:
 - 1. God is our divine Father, and we are His divine sons born of His divine life with His divine nature—John 20:17; Eph. 1:5; Gal. 3:26; John 1:12-13; 2 Pet. 1:4.
 - 2. As the many brothers of Christ, we are the same as the firstborn Son; He is divine and human, and we are human and divine—Heb. 2:11; 1:6; Rom. 8:29.
 - 3. The church is an organism with two lives and two natures combined and mingled together—Lev. 2:1-16:
 - a. The church is altogether a matter of life—the divine life and the uplifted, resurrected human life—Rom. 1:3-4.
 - b. The church has two natures—the human nature and the divine nature; thus, the church is both human and divine—Heb. 2:14, 11.
- B. The church is a corporate partnership with Christ—3:14; 1:9:
 - 1. The goal of God's operation in the universe is to accomplish a glorious expression of Himself—2:10; John 17:1, 5, 22, 24; Rev. 21:10-11.
 - 2. The firstborn Son is God's appointed Heir, and we, the many sons, have been saved to be His joint heirs, inheriting not only salvation but also all things with Him—Heb. 1:14; Rom. 8:17; Gal. 4:7; Eph. 3:6; Titus 3:7.
 - 3. Since Christ as the firstborn Son of God is God's appointed Heir and we as the many sons of God are His joint heirs, we are Christ's partners—Heb. 1:9; 3:14.
 - 4. As Christ's partners, we share in His anointing and cooperate with Him in His operation to reach the goal of God's economy—the glorious expression of the Divine Being—1:9; 2 Cor. 1:21; Rev. 21:10-11.
- C. The church, the enlargement of Christ, is the Sabbath rest—John 2:19, 21; 3:29a, 30; 1 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 3:6; 4:9:
 - 1. The individual Christ is God's Sabbath (Matt. 11:28-29), and the church is the enlargement of Christ; therefore, the church is also God's Sabbath rest.
 - 2. The church is God's satisfaction and rest because in the church God has His habitation for His expression and representation—Eph. 2:22.
- D. To come to the church is to come to the new covenant and to the heavenly New Jerusalem—Heb. 12:22-24; 8:7-13; 11:10, 16; Gal. 4:24-26:
 - 1. The new covenant, the heavenly Jerusalem, and the church are one.
 - 2. To receive the new covenant is to enter the New Jerusalem and come to the church:
 - a. Hebrews 8 indicates that the old covenant of law has been replaced by the new covenant.
 - b. Hebrews 12 says that we have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, to the Mediator of a new covenant, and to the church—vv. 22-24.
- E. The church is the unshakable kingdom of God—v. 28:

1. The unshakable kingdom that we are receiving is Christ with His enlargement:
 - a. The kingdom is actually the Lord Himself as the kingdom within us—Luke 17:20-21; Mark 4:3, 26.
 - b. Whereas the church is Christ's increase in life, the kingdom is Christ's increase in administration.
2. In the church, we are living in the kingdom of God today—John 3:3, 5; Rom. 14:17; Rev. 1:9.

III. Hebrews 13:1-19 speaks of the virtues and the experiences needed for the practice of the church life:

- A. As indicated by its content, this chapter was written with a view to a proper church life; nearly everything mentioned here, such as brotherly love and hospitality, is for the church life, not only for the Christian life—vv. 1-7, 16-18.
- B. For a true and steadfast church life, we must hold on to the Christ who is the same yesterday and today, and even forever, and must not be carried away by various strange teachings—vv. 8-9.
- C. The more we are in our spirit, enjoying the heavenly Christ, the more we will come outside the camp of religion, following the suffering Jesus—vv. 12-14.
- D. Since in the church life we enjoy the unchanging Christ as grace and follow Him outside religion, we should offer through Him spiritual sacrifices of praise to God—v. 15:
 1. In the church we should offer up through Christ a sacrifice of praise to God continually.
 2. In the church He sings in us hymns of praise unto God the Father (2:12), and in the church we too should praise God the Father through Him.
 3. Eventually, in the church He and we, we and He, praise the Father together in the mingled spirit—v. 12; 13:15:
 - a. He, as the life-giving Spirit, praises the Father in our spirit, and we, by our spirit, praise the Father in His Spirit.
 - b. This is the best and highest sacrifice that we can offer to God through Christ the Son.
 - c. This is greatly needed in the church meetings.

Excerpts from the Ministry

CHRIST IN ASCENSION

Minister of the True (Heavenly) Tabernacle

Hebrews 8:2 says that the ascended Christ is a “Minister of the holy places, even of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.” Christ, as a Minister of the true (heavenly) tabernacle, ministers heaven (which is not only a place but also a condition of life) into us, so that we may have the heavenly life and power to live a heavenly life on earth as He did while He was here.

The heavenly Christ is ministering in a tabernacle pitched by the Lord and not by man. This tabernacle, this sanctuary, is in the third heaven, in which is the heavenly Holy of Holies. The heavenly Holy of Holies, where Christ is ministering on our behalf, is connected to our spirit. Christ's ministry in the heavens takes care of our need. From the heavens Christ

ministers Himself to us as food, as our life supply, in the way of dispensing. As our Minister takes care of our needs, He carries out God's economy.

Whatever Christ carries out as the heavenly Minister, He applies to us as the Spirit. Whatever He ministers is transmitted into our spirit. Because the Lord in the heavens and the Spirit in our spirit are one, there is a continual transmission between the heavens and our spirit so that whatever takes place there is immediately applied here.

The supply we need comes from the Christ who is both the Lord in the heavens and the Spirit within us. He is interceding for us, caring for us. Now we may experience Him in all His functions as the ascended One. In particular, as the heavenly Minister He transmits what we need from God the Father, who is the source, into our spirit to supply and sustain us. This is the dispensing of the Triune God into our being. (*The Conclusion of the New Testament*, p. 347)

**As a Minister of the True Tabernacle,
Serving God's People
with the Bequests of the New Testament**

Finally, in His heavenly ministry Christ is a Minister of the true, the heavenly tabernacle (Heb. 8:2), serving God's people with the bequests, the blessings, of the new testament. As our heavenly Minister with a more excellent ministry, Christ is carrying out the better covenant. He does this by making the facts of the new covenant effective. Every fact in the new covenant is made effective by the heavenly Minister with His more excellent ministry.

Christ, the heavenly Minister, is also executing the bequests in the new testament. Whatever is a fact in the covenant is a bequest in the testament. Facts refer to certain things that have been accomplished but which are not yet designated until they are bequeathed. After the accomplished facts have been bequeathed, they immediately become bequests designated for us. Whatever is in a covenant is a fact, but whatever is in a testament is a bequest. What were facts in the covenant have now become legally designated for us as bequests in the testament. There are four facts of the new covenant which have become bequests in the new testament: the propitiation for unrighteousness and forgiveness of sins; the imparting of the law of life; the blessing of having God and of being His people; and the inward ability of knowing the Lord. In His work in His heavenly ministry Christ is now serving us with these bequests. (*The Conclusion of the New Testament*, pp. 826-827)

His Being the Same Yesterday, Today, and Forever

Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes, even forever." We should remember that the writer of the book of Hebrews spoke this word after Christ ascended to the heavens. Before His ascension He underwent changes; that is, He passed through processes. In eternity past, Christ was only the Son of God, not the Son of Man. He did not have humanity, the flesh. However, in His incarnation Christ underwent a change, picking up humanity and putting the flesh upon Himself (John 1:1, 14). Christ then passed through death and entered into resurrection. In resurrection He, as the last Adam, was transfigured into the life-giving Spirit. Thus, He changed to become that which had not been—the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). After passing through all His processes, including incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, Christ, the embodiment of God, is now processed and consummated. For Jesus Christ to remain the same yesterday, today, and forever does not mean that Christ remains unprocessed from eternity past, through time, and into eternity future. Rather, by passing through the processes, Christ underwent many changes. Yet since He went through and completed the processes, He is now processed and consummated, possessing divinity, humanity, human living, the all-inclusive crucifixion,

the all-surpassing resurrection, and the all-transcending ascension. As the Christ who has been processed and consummated, He remains the same and will remain the same forever.

Christ, who is the word that the ministers of the word of God in Hebrews 13:7 preached and taught, who is the life that they lived, and who is the Author and Perfecter of their faith, is perpetual, unchangeable, and unchanging. He remains the same forever (1:11-12). There must not be another Jesus and another gospel preached in the church (2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 1:8-9). For a true and steadfast church life, we must hold on to the Christ who is the same yesterday and today, and even forever, and we must not be carried away by various strange teachings (Heb. 13:9).

Our Going Forth unto Him outside the Camp, Bearing His Reproach

Hebrews 13:13 says, "Let us therefore go forth unto Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach." The gate in verse 12 refers to the city of Jerusalem, which signifies the earthly realm, while the camp in verse 13 refers to the tabernacle, which signifies human organization. Together, the two signify one thing, the Jewish religion with its two aspects, the earthly and the human. Judaism is both earthly and human. Christ was crucified outside the governmental gate, the gate of the city of Jerusalem, but we need to follow Him outside the religious camp, bearing His reproach. This means that we are passing through the process of suffering that He underwent. As suffering ones, we will become the same as He is.

If we would be proper Christians, we must experience Christ in the way of going outside the camp to bear His reproach, following Him in the sanctifying pathway of the cross. We must experience Christ in this particular aspect. If we would experience Him in this aspect, we must enter "within the veil" (6:19-20), that is, into the Holy of Holies, to enjoy Him as our heavenly Sanctifier in His heavenly priesthood (10:19-20).

"Outside the camp" and "within the veil" (13:13; 6:19) are two very striking points in the book of Hebrews. To enter within the veil means to enter into the Holy of Holies, where the Lord is enthroned in glory, and to go outside the camp means to come out of religion, whence the Lord was cast in rejection. This signifies that we must be in our spirit, where experientially the practical Holy of Holies is today, and outside religion, where the practical camp is today. The more we are in our spirit, enjoying the heavenly Christ, the more we will come outside the camp of religion, following the suffering Jesus. Being in our spirit to enjoy the glorified Christ enables us to come outside the camp of religion to follow the rejected Jesus. The more we remain in our spirit to contact the heavenly Christ, who is in glory, the more we will go forth outside the camp of religion unto the lowly Jesus to suffer with Him. By contacting Christ in the heavens and enjoying His glorification, we are energized to take the narrow pathway of the cross on earth and bear the reproach of Jesus.

First, the book of Hebrews gives us a clear vision of the heavenly Christ and the heavenly Holy of Holies, and then it shows us how to walk on the earth in the pathway of the cross, that is, how to go forth unto Jesus outside the camp, outside religion, bearing His reproach. Even Moses, after the children of Israel worshipped the golden calf (Exo. 32), moved to a place outside the camp, where everyone who sought the Lord went to meet with him, for both the Lord's presence and the Lord's speaking were there (33:7-11). We must go outside the camp so that we may enjoy the Lord's presence and hear His speaking. Our spirit must be in the heavens with Christ, and our steps must be with Jesus outside the camp of religion. All these things are necessary for the practical and proper church life.

Christ is our offering, our portion offered to God for us on the altar of the cross. The way to enjoy Him as our portion is twofold. On the one hand, we enjoy the ascended Christ in the

heavens in our spirit, and on the other hand, we need to follow His steps outside the camp and bear His reproach. In these two ways we fully enjoy Him as our portion. The way to enjoy Him is by entering the veil and going outside the camp. To enter the veil is to enjoy the heavenly Christ in our spirit, and to go outside the camp is to give up organized religion to follow Jesus. There is no other way to fully enjoy Him. The more we enjoy Him as the heavenly Melchizedek in our spirit, the more we will step outside the camp and give up organized religion.

To bear the Lord's reproach means that we bear the same reproach He bore; it is to bear His disgrace or shame. Further, to bear His reproach is to bear the cross (Matt. 16:24). The more we are despised, the happier we should be because we are bearing the cross. The reproach He suffered now becomes our reproach. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He suffered reproach from religion. Now as His followers, we must bear His reproach, suffering reproach from religion. This is to be a joint partaker of the tribulation in Jesus (Rev. 1:9). This is the only way for us to follow Him and enjoy Him as our portion. This is the way of faith, the way of the cross, which is the narrow pathway for us to enjoy Christ in a practical way. May the Lord be gracious to us that we may practice this.

On the one hand, we are within the veil; on the other hand, we are outside the city, the camp. On one hand, we are in the Holy of Holies; on the other hand, we are before men. Inwardly, we enjoy the resurrected Christ, and outwardly, we follow Jesus. When we pray in our room in the morning, we contact Christ. This can be likened to the Shulammite and Solomon living and fellowshiping together in the palaces of ivory (Psa. 45:8; S. S. 1:4). We touch the Lord in the inner chamber, in the Holy of Holies, in the secret place. When we testify for the Lord and work for the Lord in our outward living, we can be likened to Abigail, wandering with David in the wilderness (1 Sam. 25:39-42).

Every day we experience these two aspects. On the one hand, we are within the veil as the Shulammite, living in the Holy of Holies and enjoying the resurrected and glorified Christ, the One greater than Solomon (Matt. 12:42). On the other hand, we are outside the camp as Abigail, living in the world and following the lowly Jesus (v. 3). Like the Shulammite, we inwardly remain in the palaces of ivory and fellowship with the Lord, the real Solomon, and like Abigail, we outwardly live and work by following the Lord, the real David, to war and suffering. The One within is the resurrected Christ, whereas the One without is Jesus the Nazarene. Inwardly, we have the enjoyment of the Shulammite in the secret place, and outwardly, we have the public living of Abigail.

We not only enjoy the resurrected Christ within, but we follow the suffering Jesus without. Our colleagues, relatives, neighbors, and friends may persecute and trouble us when we testify for the Lord. At such times, we are outwardly walking on a narrow way similar to that of Jesus the Nazarene. Nevertheless, when people trouble, persecute, oppose, and harass us, we enjoy the resurrected Christ inwardly.

Philippians 3:10 says, "To know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." As far as Christ is concerned, He first experienced suffering and then resurrection. As far as we are concerned, we touch resurrection and then experience suffering. He died and then resurrected, but we resurrect and then die. No one can take the way of the cross by himself; neither can he follow the footsteps of Jesus the Nazarene by himself. It is not until a person touches and contacts the resurrected Christ within and the resurrected Christ enters into him that he can say, "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). It is the resurrected Christ in us who leads us to follow the suffering Jesus. He has walked the way of the cross and entered into us in resurrection. Now He is leading us to take the way of the cross.

When we enter within the veil by entering into our spirit, we taste the sweetness of the heavenly Christ so that we may be enabled to go outside the camp, forsaking the earth and its love. As we stay within the veil, we also have our spirit filled with the glory of the heavenly Christ so that our heart may be freed from the possession of the earth's enjoyment outside the camp. Furthermore, within the veil we behold the glorified Christ so that we may be attracted to follow the suffering Jesus outside the camp. Beholding His countenance in heaven enables us to trace His footsteps on earth. As we enter within the veil, we are infused with resurrection power (Phil. 3:10) so that we may be empowered to walk the pathway of the cross outside the camp. We also participate in the ministry of the heavenly Christ so that we may be equipped to minister Him to the thirsty spirits outside the camp. Here we enjoy the Lord's best so that we may be enriched to meet the needs of people outside the camp.

The Holy of Holies, the pathway of the cross (signified by the going forth unto Jesus outside the camp, bearing His reproach), and the kingdom are three crucial matters set forth in the book of Hebrews. The Holy of Holies with its rich supply enables us to take the narrow, difficult pathway of the cross, and the pathway of the cross ushers us into the kingdom in its manifestation so that we may obtain the reward of glory.

Through Him Our Offering Up a Sacrifice of Praise Continually to God

Hebrews 13:15 says, "Through Him then let us offer up a sacrifice of praise continually to God, that is, the fruit of lips confessing His name." This verse presents a profound thought. When we bear the reproach of Jesus and suffer on His behalf, we often groan and do not offer any praise to God. Yet the writer of the book of Hebrews tells us that when we pass through reproach and suffering, we should continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God.

Verse 15 is a continuation of verses 8 through 14. Since in the church life we enjoy the unchanging Christ as grace and follow Him outside religion, we should offer through Him spiritual sacrifices to God. First, in the church we should offer up through Him a sacrifice of praise to God continually. In the church He sings in us hymns of praise unto God the Father (2:12). In the church we too should praise God the Father through Him. Eventually, in the church He and we, we and He, praise the Father together in the mingled spirit. Christ as the life-giving Spirit, praises the Father in our spirit, and we, by our spirit, praise the Father in His Spirit. This is the best and highest sacrifice that we can offer to God through Him. This is greatly needed in the church meetings.

Through the Christ whom we have experienced and enjoyed, we need to offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually. The real praise in the meetings must be constituted of our experiences of Christ. The sweetest praises we can offer to the Father are those we offer to Christ and which concern Christ. There is nothing more pleasant to the Father's heart than this. Real worship to the Father is the offering of His Son. In the preaching of the gospel, we tell the sinners that Christ is the Son of God, who redeemed us and who can save us and bring us to the Father. If we minister these things regarding Christ to the unbelievers, this is real worship to the Father. To worship God the Father is simply to present the Son of God. The real praise to the Father comes out of our experience of Christ in our daily life. This is a very pleasing praise to the Father, gladdening and rejoicing His heart. The Father desires that we glorify Him with the Son. If we glorify the Son, we glorify the Father. When we glorify the Son, the Father is glorified in His Son's being glorified by us (John 17:1). The praises out of our experience and enjoyment of Christ—the spiritual praises about Christ—are the best praise to the Father.

Hebrews 13:16 goes on to tell us about "doing good and sharing with others." *Doing good*

refers to giving, and *fellowshipping* refers to sharing, that is, having fellowship in the needs of the saints. This kind of doing good and fellowshipping with others also are sacrifices that we should offer to God. These too are necessary for a proper church life. It is truly improper if in the church some needy saints are not well cared for and ministered to. This means that the fellowship with others is absent or inadequate. (*The Conclusion of the New Testament*, pp. 3837-3845)