

# **TAKING CHRIST AS OUR PERSON AND LIVING HIM IN AND FOR THE CHURCH LIFE**

(Saturday—Evening Session)

Message Six

## **The Apostolic Ministry in Cooperation with Christ’s Heavenly Ministry**

Scripture Reading: John 21:15-17; 10:10-11, 16; Acts 20:20, 31;  
1 Pet. 2:25; 5:1-4; Heb. 13:20-21

### **I. John 21 is the completion and consummation of the Gospel of John:**

- A. The Gospel of John has twenty-one chapters, but it actually ends with chapter 20; the entire book covers the earthly ministry of Christ, beginning with His incarnation as the Word of God to become a man in the flesh (1:1, 14) and ending with His resurrection as the last Adam to become the life-giving Spirit (20:22; 1 Cor. 15:45b); hence, John 21 should be an appendix.
- B. Although it is correct to say this, it is more intrinsic to say that John 21 is the completion and consummation of the Gospel of John; chapter 21 consummates the entire Gospel of John by showing that Christ’s heavenly ministry and the apostles’ ministry on the earth cooperate together to carry out God’s New Testament economy.

### **II. In 10:10, 11, and 16 the Lord unveiled to the disciples that He was the good Shepherd who came that the sheep might have life abundantly and that He had other sheep (the Gentiles) that He must lead to join with them (the Jewish believers) to be one flock (one church) under one Shepherd:**

- A. First, the Lord’s shepherding was in His earthly ministry—Matt. 9:36; 10:1-6.
- B. Second, the Lord’s shepherding is in His heavenly ministry (1 Pet. 5:4) to take care of the church, issuing in His Body.

### **III. In this appendix, when the Lord stayed with His disciples after His resurrection and before His ascension, in one of His appearances, He commissioned Peter to feed His lambs and shepherd His sheep in His absence, while He is in the heavens—John 21:15-17:**

- A. This is to incorporate the apostolic ministry with Christ’s heavenly ministry to take care of God’s flock, which is the church that issues in the Body of Christ.
- B. The following words of the apostle Paul confirm this:
  - 1. “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood”—Acts 20:28.
  - 2. “Fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock”—v. 29.
  - 3. “God...brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, in the blood of an eternal covenant”—Heb. 13:20.

### **IV. Peter was so impressed with this commission of the Lord that:**

- A. In his first book he tells the believers that they were like sheep being led astray,

but they have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer (Christ) of their souls—1 Pet. 2:25.

- B. He exhorts the elders to shepherd the flock of God among them so that when the Chief Shepherd is manifested, they will receive the unfading crown of glory—5:1-4.
- C. Peter tells the elders that their obligation is to shepherd God's flock according to God—vv. 1-2:
  - 1. *According to God* means that we must live God; we must have God on hand.
  - 2. When we are one with God, we become God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead; then we have God and are the acting God in our shepherding of others.
  - 3. To shepherd according to God is to shepherd according to what God is in His attributes—love, light, holiness, and righteousness.
  - 4. To shepherd according to God is to shepherd according to God's nature, desire, way, and glory, not according to man's preference, interest, and purpose.
- D. Peter's word indicates that the heavenly ministry of Christ is mainly to shepherd the church of God as His flock, which issues in His Body.

**V. The main purpose and goal of the apostolic ministry incorporated with Christ's heavenly ministry are to build up the Body of Christ, which will consummate the New Jerusalem for the accomplishment of the eternal economy of God.**

**VI. The matter of shepherding God's flock for the main purpose and ultimate consummation of the eternal economy of God is referred to even in Song of Songs:**

- A. "Tell me, you whom my soul loves, Where do you pasture your flock [for satisfaction]? / Where do you make it lie down at noon [for rest]?"—1:7a.
- B. "Go forth on the footsteps of the flock, / And pasture your young goats / By the shepherds' tents"—v. 8b.
- C. "My beloved is mine, and I am his; / He pastures his flock among the lilies [the seekers of Christ who live a life of trusting in God with a single heart]"—2:16.
- D. "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine; / He pastures his flock among the lilies"—6:3.

**VII. Without John 21 as such an appendix, the Gospel of John does not have an adequate and complete ending:**

- A. If we do not know what shepherding is, the entire Gospel of John will be in vain to us; it is only when we shepherd others that we can know John in an intrinsic way; shepherding is the key to the Gospel of John.
- B. We must take the shepherding way to preach the gospel and revive the church:
  - 1. We must not lord it over God's allotments but become patterns of the flock—1 Pet. 5:3.
  - 2. We must be willing to be slaves to the saints and must humble ourselves under the saints.
  - 3. The elders should shepherd one another and love one another to be a model of the Body life.

4. We must take care of the saints in everything and in every way for the dispensing of Christ into them.
5. We must contact and visit the saints and invite them to our home for meals.

**VIII. We need to shepherd people according to the pattern of the Lord Jesus in His ministry for carrying out God's eternal economy—Matt. 9:36; John 10:11:**

- A. In Luke 15 the Lord Jesus unveiled the saving love of the Triune God for sinners:
  1. We need to follow the steps of the processed Triune God in seeking and gaining fallen people—vv. 1-10, 17-18.
  2. Our not having the Father's loving and forgiving heart and the Savior's shepherding and seeking spirit is the reason for our barrenness.
  3. We need to cherish people (to make them happy and to make them feel pleasant and comfortable) in the humanity of Jesus—Matt. 9:10; Luke 7:34.
  4. We need to nourish people (to feed them with the all-inclusive Christ in His ministry of three stages) in the divinity of Christ—Matt. 24:45-47.
- B. Christ came not as a Judge but as a Physician to heal, recover, enliven, and save the lepers (8:2-4), paralytics (vv. 5-13; 9:2-8), the fever-ridden (8:14-15), the demon-possessed (vv. 16, 28-32), those ill with all kinds of diseases (v. 16), despised tax collectors, and sinners (9:9-11) that they might be reconstituted to become people of His heavenly kingdom—vv. 12-13.
- C. He had to pass through Samaria, purposely detouring to Sychar to gain one immoral woman, cherishing her by asking her to give Him something to drink that He might nourish her with the flowing Triune God as the water of life—John 4:3-14.
- D. As the One without sin, He did not condemn the adulterous woman but cherished her by forgiving her sins judicially and setting her free from her sins organically—8:1-11, 32, 36.
- E. He went to Jericho just to visit and gain one person, a chief tax collector, and His preaching was a shepherding—Luke 19:1-10.
- F. He cherished the parents by laying His hands on their children—Matt. 19:13-15.
- G. The first one saved by Christ through His crucifixion was a robber sentenced to death—Luke 23:42-43.
- H. In His heavenly ministry Christ as the High Priest, with a golden girdle about His breasts, is cherishing and nourishing the churches—Rev. 1:12-13.
- I. In His heavenly ministry Christ is the great Shepherd of the sheep to consummate the New Jerusalem according to God's eternal covenant—Heb. 13:20-21.

**IX. The apostles were a pattern of the glad tidings that they spread—"you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake"—1 Thes. 1:5b:**

- A. In the church the most important thing is the person; the person is the way, and the person is the Lord's work; what you are is what you do—John 5:19; 6:57; Phil. 1:19-26; Acts 20:18-35; Matt. 7:17-18; 12:33-37.
- B. We need to follow the pattern of the apostles to pay more attention to life than to work—John 12:24; 2 Cor. 4:12.

- C. Paul shepherded the saints as a nursing mother and an exhorting father—1 Thes. 2:7-8, 11-12.
  - D. Paul shepherded the saints in Ephesus by teaching them “publicly and from house to house” (Acts 20:20) and by admonishing each one of the saints with tears even for as long as three years (vv. 31, 19), declaring to them all the counsel of God (v. 27).
  - E. He had an intimate concern for the believers—2 Cor. 7:3; Philem. 7, 12.
  - F. He came down to the weak ones’ level so that he could gain them—2 Cor. 11:28-29; 1 Cor. 9:22; cf. Matt. 12:20.
  - G. He was willing to spend what he had, referring to his possessions, and to spend what he was, referring to his being, for the sake of the saints—2 Cor. 12:15.
  - H. He was a drink offering, one with Christ as the wine producer, sacrificing himself for others’ enjoyment of Christ—Phil. 2:17; Judg. 9:13; Eph. 3:2.
  - I. Paul indicated in his teaching that the church is a home to raise up people, a hospital to heal and recover them, and a school to teach and edify them—2:19; 1 Thes. 5:14; 1 Cor. 14:31.
- X. “I hope that there will be a genuine revival among us by our receiving this burden of shepherding. If all the churches receive this teaching to participate in Christ’s wonderful shepherding, there will be a big revival in the recovery” (*The Vital Groups*, p. 40)—cf. Psa. 22—24 (footnote 1 on 22:1 and footnote 1 on 24:1).**

### Excerpts from the Ministry:

#### JOHN 21 BEING THE COMPLETION AND CONSUMMATION OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

The Gospel of John has twenty-one chapters, but it actually ends with chapter 20. The entire book covers the earthly ministry of Christ, beginning with His incarnation as the Word of God to become a man in the flesh (1:1-14) and ending with His resurrection as the last Adam to become the life-giving Spirit (ch. 20); hence, chapter 21 should be an appendix. Although it is correct to say this, it is more intrinsic to say that John 21 is the completion and consummation of the Gospel of John. Without chapter 21 John is not completed. It consummates the entire Gospel of John by showing that Christ’s heavenly ministry and the apostles’ ministry on the earth cooperate together to carry out God’s New Testament economy.

#### THE GOOD SHEPHERD

In John 10:10, 11, and 16 the Lord unveiled to the disciples that He was the good Shepherd who came that the sheep might have life abundantly and that He had other sheep (the Gentiles) that He must lead to join with them (the Jewish believers) to be one flock (one church) under one Shepherd.

#### In His Earthly Ministry

First, the Lord’s shepherding was in His earthly ministry (Matt. 9:36). The Lord saw the Israelites as sheep harassed by their leaders; they were cast away like sheep not having a shepherd. The Lord as the Shepherd of God’s elect prayed, and God told His sent One to appoint twelve apostles that they might take care of the sheep of God (10:1-6).

### **In His Heavenly Ministry**

Second, the Lord's shepherding is in His heavenly ministry (1 Pet. 5:4) to take care of the church of God, issuing in His Body. When He was on the earth, He was shepherding. After His resurrection and ascension to the heavens, He is still shepherding.

#### **COMMISSIONING PETER TO FEED HIS LAMBS AND SHEPHERD HIS SHEEP**

When the Lord stayed with His disciples after His resurrection and before His ascension, in one of His appearances, He commissioned Peter to feed His lambs and shepherd His sheep in His absence, while He is in the heavens (John 21:15-17). Shepherding implies feeding, but it includes much more than feeding. To shepherd is to take all-inclusive tender care of the flock.

#### **Incorporating the Apostolic Ministry with Christ's Heavenly Ministry**

This is to incorporate the apostolic ministry with Christ's heavenly ministry to take care of God's flock, which is the church that issues in the Body of Christ.

#### **The Words of the Apostle Paul concerning Shepherding**

The following words of the apostle Paul confirm this.

##### ***The Elders' Shepherding the Church of God***

In Acts 20:28 Paul told the elders of Ephesus, "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained [or, purchased] through His own blood." Although Paul was on an urgent trip back to Jerusalem, while he was journeying, he sent word for the elders in Ephesus to come to him. Then he gave them a long word recorded in Acts 20.

##### ***Fierce Wolves Not Sparing the Flock***

Paul said that "fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock" (v. 29). The flock is the church.

##### ***The Great Shepherd of the Sheep***

Paul says in Hebrews 13:20, "God...brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, in the blood of an eternal covenant." The eternal covenant is the covenant of the new testament to gain a flock, which is the church issuing in the Body and consummating the New Jerusalem. The eternal covenant of God is to consummate the New Jerusalem by the shepherding. God raised up our Lord from the dead to be the great Shepherd to consummate the New Jerusalem according to God's eternal covenant.

#### **PETER'S IMPRESSION WITH THE LORD'S COMMISSION TO FEED HIS LAMBS AND SHEPHERD HIS SHEEP**

##### **Telling the Believers to Return to Christ as the Shepherd and Overseer of Their Souls**

Peter was so impressed with this commission of the Lord that in his first book he tells the believers that they were like sheep being led astray, but they have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer (Christ) of their souls (2:25). Christ's shepherding of His flock includes His caring for their outward things and also their inner being, their souls. He takes care of the things concerning their souls by overseeing their souls. Christ indwells us to be

our life and everything, but He is also overseeing, observing, the condition and situation of our inner being. He shepherds us by caring for the welfare of our inner being and by exercising His oversight over the condition of our soul, our real person.

### **Exhorting the Elders to Shepherd the Flock of God**

Peter exhorts the elders to shepherd the flock of God among them so that when the Chief Shepherd is manifested, they, the faithful elders, will receive the unfading crown of glory (5:1-4).

### **The Heavenly Ministry of Christ Being Mainly to Shepherd the Church of God**

Peter's word indicates that the heavenly ministry of Christ is mainly to shepherd the church of God as His flock, which issues in His Body.

### **THE MAIN PURPOSE AND GOAL OF THE APOSTOLIC MINISTRY INCORPORATED WITH CHRIST'S HEAVENLY MINISTRY**

The main purpose and goal of the apostolic ministry incorporated with Christ's heavenly ministry are to build up the Body of Christ, which will consummate the New Jerusalem for the accomplishment of the eternal economy of God.

### **THE SHEPHERDING OF GOD'S FLOCK IN SONG OF SONGS**

This matter of shepherding God's flock for the main purpose and ultimate consummation of the eternal economy of God is referred to even in Song of Songs. In this book Christ shepherds His seeker and pursuer.

### **The Lord Pasturing His Flock for Satisfaction and Rest**

In Song of Songs 1:7a the seeker says, "Tell me, you whom my soul loves, Where do you pasture your flock [for satisfaction]? / Where do you make it lie down at noon [for rest]?"

### **Going Forth on the Footsteps of the Flock**

The Shepherd responds to the seeker by saying, "Go forth on the footsteps of the flock, / And pasture your young goats / By the shepherds' tents" (v. 8b). Under the Lord as the Chief Shepherd there are many other shepherds. The many shepherds pasture their young by their tents, that is, where they live.

### **Pasturing His Flock among the Lilies**

Song of Songs 2:16 says, "My beloved is mine, and I am his; / He pastures his flock among the lilies [the seekers of Christ who live a life of trusting in God with a single heart]." The Lord is pasturing all His seekers as lilies, taking care of them, feeding them, and shepherding them that they may grow.

### **Shepherding Being Crucial for the Growth in the Divine Life**

Song of Songs 6:3 says, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine; / He pastures his flock among the lilies." To shepherd the believers is very crucial for their growth in life.

### **JOHN 21 BEING AN ADEQUATE AND COMPLETE ENDING**

Without John 21 the Gospel of John does not have an adequate and complete ending.

## **TAKING THE SHEPHERDING WAY TO PREACH THE GOSPEL AND REVIVE THE CHURCH**

When I first went to Taiwan, I thought nothing could be worked out there. At that time it was a desolate small island. One day the Lord told me to go along the railway from Taipei to visit the saints. After that visitation I was deeply impressed that Taiwan could be a very good field for the Lord's recovery. I picked up a burden and decided to begin the ministry there with a conference on August 1, 1949. About four or five hundred Christians from different denominations, who had escaped from mainland China to Taiwan, came on the first day of the conference. I said to them, "We are here to serve one kind of food—Christ. Please be clear about this. If you want anything else, you are wasting your time in coming here." Most of them did not come back. Only the real seekers came.

We took down their names and began to shepherd them. We distributed their names to different brothers and sisters to go and visit them. From the beginning of the work in Taiwan, we practiced shepherding. When we had a big gospel meeting, we could get about five to six hundred names. Then we distributed all the names for the proper care. Most people want to have genuine, proper visitors. When we visit people, we should be genuine in our care for them. They will sense that we are not vain people. This shepherding way of preaching the gospel by visiting people warms them up. The church life in Taiwan began with about three or four hundred believers, but after four years we had forty thousand. Most of the people were not saved directly by my ministry; they were saved by the proper shepherding, the proper care. We all have to learn this.

Before I went to Taiwan in 1949, I was in Chefoo. I spoke each Lord's Day, and during the week I and an older brother went to visit the new ones. We were warmly welcomed by every family. They would gather their household together when we came. Within a short time there was a real revival in Chefoo. The gospel was preached everywhere, not just by myself but by all the saints.

I also made the decision to set up a kitchen in the meeting hall, and I invited groups of twenty or thirty saints to eat together for fellowship. Within a little over half a year, I had invited all the members of the church. At that time there were at least five to six hundred saints in the church in Chefoo. This kind of shepherding stirred up the entire church. I hope that the elders would use the hall as a dining room and invite the saints to come for fellowship. An elder should contact at least one person every day for the purpose of shepherding. We should also invite people to our homes for a meal, not inviting the familiar ones but the new ones. The revival in Chefoo occurred because of this kind of shepherding.

Shepherding works. We should not desire to be giant speakers to make a name for ourselves. People may be attracted to come to listen to us, but who will take care of them afterward? The way of having large gospel campaigns does not work. In some places this has been tested out. We may have big gospel meetings with many people, but eventually not many of them are added to the church. Also, we should not use famous or well-known people to testify in our meetings. This will not save people to be added to the church. Even if someone is the president of the country, he should be in the meeting just as anyone else. The way that can save people effectively must be by small vital groups, and everyone in this small vital group must be a shepherd. After a short time the church will be revived. No other way is more prevailing than this shepherding way.

For the shepherding of the saints, there must be the healthy teaching in the vital groups. In 1 Timothy 3:2 Paul says that an elder should be apt to teach. Teaching here is similar to parents' teaching their children. An elder must be apt to render this kind of home teaching to the members of a local church. Then in 5:17 Paul says, "Let the elders who take the lead

well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in word and teaching.” *Double honor* refers to material supply for the support of the faithful elders, especially those who labor to teach others.

In the vital groups we must have something to teach others. We are the prophethood, the prophets speaking for God, and the sonship, the sons of God. Every son must be a speaker. Today God speaks in the Son (Heb. 1:2), not only the individual Son but the corporate son. As a son of God, we must learn to be a speaker. We can speak of the five great historical events in John 1: creation, incarnation, the Lamb, the Spirit, and the ladder. This will stir up people’s interest. When we explain these things, they will be edified.

At another time we can speak of our Lord as the Son of Man, who as the ladder brings heaven to earth and joins earth to heaven. He is the Son of Man who has been lifted up on the cross, just as the bronze serpent was lifted up by Moses (3:14). As the Son of Man, He has ascended and is at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56). In Revelation Christ is trimming all the lampstands as the Son of Man (1:13), and as the Son of Man, He will be sitting on a cloud to reap the harvest of the believers near the end of the great tribulation (14:14). He will return again as the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven (Matt. 26:64). Matthew 25:31 says that He will be the Son of Man sitting on His throne of glory to judge the nations. Eventually, in eternity He will be the Son of Man as the ladder of the universe (John 1:51). If we teach these things, we will stir up people. We have to learn to teach. We have to labor in the Word. If there is no labor, there will be no gain. We lovers and seekers of Christ should learn how to speak as prophets and sons of God.

I hope that we would pray, “Lord, I want to be revived. From today I want to be a shepherd. I want to go to feed people, to shepherd people, and to flock people together.” In John 10 and 21 the Lord used three words concerning shepherding: *feed*, *shepherd*, and *flock*. He said, “Feed My lambs,” and, “Shepherd My sheep” (21:15-16). He also said, “I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must lead them also, and they shall hear My voice, and there shall be one flock, one Shepherd” (10:16). The other sheep are the Gentile believers who would be joined together with the Jewish believers to be one flock. The Lord used the word *flock* here as a noun. I also like to use it as a verb. We should learn to feed, to shepherd, and to flock together. All the churches have to learn how to flock together so that they can be blent together. In the atmosphere of flocking, people are subdued, convinced, nourished, and stirred up by the Lord. All the nearby churches should be flocked together for the saints to be shepherded and stirred up. The elders and co-workers should take the lead to practice this. (*Crystallization-study of the Gospel of John*, pp. 130-137)