

**PROPAGATING THE RESURRECTED,
ASCENDED, AND ALL-INCLUSIVE CHRIST
AS THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

(Thursday—Second Morning Session)

Message Two

**The Continuation of the Book of Acts—
Living in the Divine History within Human History**

Scripture Reading: Acts 28:31; John 5:17; Acts 1:14; 6:7; 11:23-24; 19:20; 26:18

- I. The book of Acts reveals a group of people who live in the divine history within human history as the acting God; they have become God in life, in nature, in expression, and in function (but not in the Godhead) for the spreading and building up of the church as the corporate manifestation of Christ—1:8, 14; 2:14a; 4:10-20, 31-32; 5:20, 38-39; 13:1-4; 26:16-19; 28:31:**
- A. In Peter's first proclamation of the gospel in the book of Acts, he quoted from the book of Joel, which reveals the intrinsic, divine history within the outward, human history—Acts 2:17-21; Joel 1:1-4; 2:28-32.
 - B. The divine history within the human history is Christ's "goings forth...from the days of eternity" (Micah 5:2) across the bridge of time into eternity future (Psa. 90:2) so that He might be dispensed into His chosen ones as the Desire of all the nations (Hag. 2:7) for His corporate manifestation and His full glorification.
 - C. Joel speaks concerning the outpouring of the processed, consummated, compound Spirit, who was poured out on the day of Pentecost; this Spirit is the consummated Triune God and the realization of Christ for the manifestation of Christ—2:28-29; Acts 2:1-4, 16-21; 1 Tim. 3:15-16.
- II. The Acts of the Apostles is a book without an ending because this book is still being continued as the divine history within human history—28:31:**
- A. The Lord said, "My Father is working until now, and I also am working" (John 5:17); this shows that since the rebellion of Satan and the fall of man, God has been working until now, and the Lord is also working.
 - B. The book of Acts is a record of the work of God; after Acts 28 many of God's vessels are still carrying on with His work; His work is continuing and has not stopped.
 - C. His work will go on until the kingdom and even until the new heaven and new earth; God is always advancing; He never stops; if we know this and believe in this, we will praise the Lord; even as the New Jerusalem, His slaves will serve Him as priests—Rev. 22:3; cf. Acts 13:36a.
 - D. The work of the Holy Spirit in preaching Christ for His propagation, multiplication, and spread through the believers of Christ was not yet completed and needed to be continued for a long period of time.
 - E. Such an evangelistic work for Christ's increase, propagation, multiplication, and spread is according to God's New Testament economy for the producing of many sons for God (Rom. 8:29) that they might be the members of Christ to constitute

His Body (12:5) for the carrying out of God's eternal plan and the fulfillment of His eternal will; this is revealed in detail in the twenty-one Epistles and the book of Revelation, which follow the book of Acts.

- F. Since God is after a corporate, shining vessel, a vessel of testimony, His children must be brought to the awareness of the Body of Christ and learn to live the Body life; otherwise, they are useless in His hand and can never fulfill His goal—Rom. 12:1-5; 1 Cor. 12:12; Rev. 1:10-12.
- G. Even the testimony of the overcomers is maintained on behalf of the whole church; they do the work, and the whole church receives the benefit—12:5-9; 2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:3, 5, 12, 20-21.
- H. The overcomers are not for themselves; they stand on the ground of the church, and they are there to bring the whole church to perfection; even the victories of the overcomers are corporate victories—cf. Phil. 1:19.

III. The word of God is still growing and being multiplied as the continuation of the book of Acts—6:7; 12:24; 19:20:

- A. *Grew* in Acts 6:7 refers to the growth in life, indicating that the word of God is a matter of life that grows as a seed sown into man's heart for the increase of Christ, the growth of God, within us—Mark 4:14; Col. 2:19.
- B. *Multiplied* in Acts 12:24 refers to the increase of Christ in numbers; actually, the multiplication of the disciples depends on the growth of the word.
- C. New disciples are "added to the Lord" to become the parts of Christ, the members of Christ—5:14; 11:24; Rom. 15:16.
- D. We need to encourage the new believers "to remain with the Lord with purpose of heart"; this is to be persistently faithful to the Lord, cleave to Him, and live in close fellowship with Him—Acts 11:23.

IV. The book of Acts reveals a group of people who live in the divine history within human history by calling on the name of the Lord, suffering on behalf of the name of the Lord, and speaking in the name of the Lord, the name of Jesus:

- A. Joel's prophecy and its fulfillment concerning God's New Testament jubilee have two aspects: on God's side, He poured out His Spirit in the ascension of the resurrected Christ; on our side, we call on the name of the ascended Lord, who has accomplished all, attained unto all, and obtained all—Acts 2:16-18, 21; Joel 2:28-29, 32a:
 - 1. Our divine history in the midst of human history is a history of calling on the name of the Lord to enjoy the riches of Christ for the building up of the Body of Christ as the fullness of Christ—Rom. 10:12-13; Eph. 3:8, 19; 1:22-23.
 - 2. By calling on the name of the Lord, we keep ourselves in God's golden, divine history—a history that begins with Enosh (Gen. 4:26), continues through the Old and New Testaments (Job 12:4; Gen. 12:8; 26:25; Deut. 4:7; Judg. 15:18; 1 Sam. 12:18; Psa. 116:4, 13, 17; 80:18; 88:9; 1 Kings 18:24; Isa. 12:4; Lam. 3:55, 57; Psa. 99:6; Isa. 55:6; Jonah 1:6; 2 Kings 5:11; Isa. 41:25; Acts 2:21; 7:59; 9:14, 21; 22:16; Rom. 10:12-13; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Tim. 2:22), and concludes with the last prayer in the Bible (Rev. 22:20).

- B. As we are living in the divine history, we suffer on behalf of the Lord's name within the human history; it is a real honor to be dishonored on behalf of the Name, the very name of the man-dishonored but God-honored Jesus—Acts 4:18-20, 29-31; 5:41-42; 9:13-16; 2 Cor. 6:4; 11:23; Col. 1:24-25.
 - C. We carry out the divine history within human history by speaking “boldly in the name of Jesus”; this name is the expression of the sum total of what the Lord is in His person and work—Acts 9:27; Phil. 2:9-11; 1 Thes. 2:2; 2 Cor. 4:5.
- V. The book of Acts reveals a group of people who live in the divine history within human history by living, moving, and acting as one Body; they do everything in the Body, through the Body, and for the Body:**
- A. After the Lord Jesus died, resurrected, and ascended, He continued to live, act, walk, and work on earth in thousands of people because He imparted Himself into them through His death and resurrection—John 12:24.
 - B. The four Gospels give us a picture of the Head, and the book of Acts shows us the Body; the book of Acts is actually the acts of Christ by the Spirit in the church as His Body, His reproduction and duplication—1:14; 2:14a, 42; 9:4-5; 28:13-15.
- VI. The book of Acts reveals a group of people who live in the divine history within human history by rejecting themselves and living by another life—Christ as the divine life; this corporate living of Christ is the reality of the Body of Christ:**
- A. The life that is indicated by *this life* in Acts 5:20 is the divine life preached, ministered, and lived by Peter that overcame the Jewish leaders' persecution, threatening, and imprisonment; Peter's life and work made the divine life so real and present in his situation that even the angel saw it and pointed it out.
 - B. Paul lived Christ and served God by the all-inclusive Spirit of Jesus in his spirit (the divine Spirit mingled with his human spirit as one spirit); he lived within the veil (in his spirit as the practical Holy of Holies) and outside the camp (the human organization of religion)—16:6-7; 17:16; 19:21; Rom. 8:16; 2 Tim. 4:22; 1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 1:9; Phil. 3:3; Heb. 6:19-20; 13:13.
 - C. In order to live in the divine history within human history and by the divine life in our human life, we need to be vessels open to the Lord, loving Him, receiving Him, being filled with Him, and letting Him be everything to us and do everything in us, through us, and for us—Acts 9:15; 2 Cor. 4:7; Rom. 9:21, 23; cf. 2 Kings 4:1-6.
- VII. The book of Acts reveals a group of people who live in the divine history within human history by continuing steadfastly in prayer and in the ministry of the word; this is to live in the apostolic ministry in coordination with Christ as our great High Priest in His heavenly ministry—6:4; Heb. 7:25; 8:1-2:**
- A. By prayer we set our mind on the things above and become a reflection of Christ's ministry in the heavens; we depend on prayer to do what man cannot do, to understand what man cannot understand, and to speak what man cannot

speak—Acts 9:11; 13:1-4; Col. 3:1-3; 4:2; Eph. 6:18; Dan. 6:10; 9:2-3; 1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Cor. 3:6.

- B. By the ministry of the word, we impart Christ into others as the heavenly life and power so that they may be sustained with the riches of Christ to live Christ as their heavenly life on earth—Rom. 15:16; cf. Isa. 50:4-5.

VIII. The book of Acts reveals a group of people who live in the divine history within human history seen in Psalm 68, which shows that Christ is the center of God's move on the earth and the reality of God's activities through the church—vv. 1, 24:

- A. We need to enjoy the processed and consummated Triune God as the life-dispensing and outpoured Spirit day by day—vv. 11-13; Acts 2:46-47; 5:42; 16:5; 20:31; 28:30-31.
- B. We need to dwell in Christ as the “shore” of the evangelists for the transportation and spreading in the preaching of the gospel; on the day of Pentecost at least one hundred twenty gospel “ships,” all of whom were Galileans, set out from the shore to spread the gospel—Psa. 68:27; Gen. 49:13; Acts 2:7; 13:31.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE CONTINUATION OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

There are sixty-six books in the Bible. When we come to the end of many of these books, we can say that the book is finished. There are fifty chapters in Genesis, and when we come to the end, we sense that we have come to the end. The Gospel of Matthew has twenty-eight chapters. When we come to chapter twenty-eight, we feel that we have come to the end. When we come to Romans 16, we also feel that this is the end. When we read Revelation 22, we also feel that this is the end.

But there is one book in the Bible which does not have an end. All the other sixty-five books have an end. But one book does not have an end. This book is the Acts of the Apostles. Why does Acts 28 end the way it does? When you read Acts 28, you feel as if the book has not yet concluded. This book does not have an ending. The Acts of the Apostles is a book without an ending because this book is still being continued. Perhaps the acts of the first-century apostles have ended, but the book of Acts as a whole has not yet ended. Until now we still have the Acts of the Apostles with us. This book has not yet ended.

The Lord said, “My Father is working until now, and I also am working” (John 5:17). This shows that since the rebellion of Satan and the fall of man, God has been working until now, and the Lord is also working. What is the book of Acts? The book of Acts is not a record of the work of Paul or a record of the work of Peter or John. The book of Acts is a record of the work of God. Who can say that God has done no work after Acts 28? Who can say that God's work stopped after Acts 28?

The book of Acts does not have an ending. After chapter twenty-eight, many of God's vessels are still carrying on with His work. His work is continuing and has not stopped. Everything was not over after Paul worked in Rome for two years. Paul lived in Rome and was later martyred. None of these things are recorded in the book of Acts. Peter, Paul, and John are three important persons, yet none of their endings were recorded. How can we say that the book of Acts has ended? God's testimony can never be finished. We could say the same thing even if there was a twenty-ninth chapter, or a thirtieth chapter, or even a hundredth chapter. If one wanted to write more, new things could always be added. This is why

Acts stops at chapter twenty-eight. Although the written record no longer continued after chapter twenty-eight, God's work has been going on. The work in the first century was not the peak. For four thousand years, God has been working. If we say that Acts 28 was the peak, we must be at the bottom of the hill; we must have come down from the peak. This is not true, because the Lord said, "My Father is working until now, and I also am working." We should not assume that God's work reached its peak at the time of Paul, and we should not consider that God's work reached its peak at the time of Martin Luther either. No, the first century was not the end of God's work, nor was the sixteenth century the end of His work. Even last century was not the end of God's work. His work will go on until the kingdom and even until the new heaven and the new earth. God is always advancing; He never stops. If we know this and believe in this, we will praise our Lord.

Man always has a misconception that his age is the worst age of the church. At the time of Martin Luther some thought this way. At the time of John Wesley some thought this way. We consider Martin Luther's time a marvelous age and John Wesley's time a marvelous age also. While we consider their ages marvelous, some who come fifty years after us will say that we were at a marvelous age. We are afraid that man will stop. But God never stops. Every year, He knows what He is doing, and He knows how much He will work. Every year, He does what He wants to do. He is a God who goes on day by day; He is always advancing. Hallelujah! God is a God who keeps on advancing!

Every time God advances, He finds some vessels. In the book of Acts, God found some vessels. At the time of Martin Luther, God found a vessel, and at the time of John Wesley, He also found a vessel. Every time there is a spiritual revival, God finds some vessels. Where is God's vessel today? It is true that the Father is working until now. But who is continuing to work together with Him? Who can say, "I also am working"? This is the crucial question.

Brothers and sisters, if God grants us light and if we see God's truth, we will admit that God is after the same vessel today that He ordained at the beginning. This vessel is the church. In other words, God is not after an individual vessel today but a corporate one. Since God is after a corporate vessel, His children must be brought to the awareness of the Body of Christ and the Body life. Otherwise, they are useless in His hand and can never fulfill His goal.

Revelation 1 tells us that the churches are golden lampstands. God does not simply say that the churches are golden; He says that the churches are golden lampstands. If the churches are just golden, they cannot satisfy God. God says that the churches are golden lampstands because golden lampstands shine and enlighten. God desires the church to be a shining vessel, a vessel of testimony. From the beginning God has ordained that the church be a lampstand. The church, not individuals, is a lampstand before the Lord. It is not enough just to be golden, and it is not enough just to be of God. There must be the shining for God and the testimony for Him before the church can be considered the lampstand.

Hence, the church exists for God's testimony. Anything that is not golden is not the church, and anything that is not a lampstand is not the church. Anything that does not have life within is not the church, and anything that does not have the testimony within is also not the church. The church must realize what God is doing and what He is after in this age; it must realize what God's testimony on the earth today is. Only then can the church be considered the golden lampstand.

Simply put, God's work is always advancing. He is still seeking this vessel. His vessel today is the same vessel He intended to have at the beginning; the church is this vessel, not single individuals.

Some may ask, What does it mean that the overcomers come out of the church? It is true that there needs to be overcomers who come out of the church. But even the testimony of the overcomers is maintained on behalf of the corporate whole; it is not for individuals alone. The overcomers are not men who consider themselves extraordinary, better than others, and who put everyone else aside. The overcomers work on behalf of the whole church. They do the work, while the whole church gains the benefit. The overcomers are not for themselves; they stand on the ground of the church, and they are there to bring the whole church to perfection. They stand on the ground of the church and maintain their stand on behalf of the church. Even the victories of the overcomers are corporate victories.

The vessel God is after is a corporate one. Therefore, we have to learn to live the Body life. In order to live the Body life, we have to deny the natural life and be judged and dealt with by God in a deep way. We must learn obedience, and we must also learn fellowship. In this way, we will have the chance of becoming God's vessel. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 37, pp. 121-124)