

THE SPIRITUAL WARFARE OF THE CHURCH AS THE NEW MAN

Message Six

The Prayer of the Age to Fulfill God's Economy and the Sacrifice of Praise to Display Christ's Victory

Scripture Reading: Acts 2:36; Eph. 1:19-23; Psalms 22:3; 119:164; Heb. 13:15; 2 Chron. 20:20-22

- Acts 2:36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has **made** Him both **Lord** and **Christ**, this Jesus whom you have crucified.
- Ephesians 1:19 And what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the operation of the might of His strength,
- Ephesians 1:20 Which He caused to operate in Christ in raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavenlies,
- Ephesians 1:21 **Far above all rule and authority and power and lordship** and every name that is named not only in this age but also in that which is to come;
- Ephesians 1:22 And He **subjected** all things under His feet and gave Him to be **Head** over all things to the church,
- Ephesians 1:23 Which is His **Body**, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.
- Psalms 22: 3 But You are holy, You who **sit enthroned** Upon the praises of Israel.
- Psalms 119:164 **Seven times a day I praise** You For Your righteous ordinances.
- Hebrews 13:15 Through Him then let us **offer up a sacrifice of praise continually** to God, that is, the fruit of lips confessing His name.
- 2 Chronicles 20:20 And they rose up early in the morning and went out to the wilderness of Tekoa. And as they went out, Jehoshaphat stood up and said, Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem. Believe in Jehovah your God, and you will be established; believe in His prophets, and you will succeed.
- 2 Chronicles 20:21 And when he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed them to **sing** to Jehovah and **give thanks** in holy array as they went out before the army and say, Give thanks to Jehovah, for His lovingkindness endures forever.
- 2 Chronicles 20:22 **And when they began to shout in song** and to **praise**, Jehovah set ambushes for the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who were coming out against Judah; and they were struck.

Psalms 8:2, "**Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings You have established strength** Because of Your adversaries, To stop the enemy and the avenger."

Matthew 21:16, "And they said to Him, Do you hear what these are saying? And Jesus said to them, Yes. Have you never read, "**Out of the mouth of infants and sucklings You have perfected praise**?"

Psalm 8:2 says that the Lord has **established strength** out of the mouths of babes and sucklings. Seemingly, strength does not refer to something that comes out of the mouth. When the Lord quoted this verse in Matthew 21:16, He used the word **praise** instead of strength. Weaker ones in themselves cannot praise. To cry or weep does not require strength, but **to praise requires strength**. When we gossip, argue, or reason with people, that does not require strength. But without strength, we cannot praise the Lord. Some praises may come out of our mouth, but they cannot be considered as perfected praises, because they are not so full of strength. **Praises should be full of strength**. Many times when the saints are praising the Lord, we can see the strength.

The Hebrew word for established is a hard word to translate. In the Lord's quotation in Matthew 21:16, it says that He has "perfected" praise out of the mouths of the babes and sucklings. Psalm 8 says that He **established strength** out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, but the Lord Jesus quoted it by saying that He **perfected praise**. Is our praise perfect? We have to admit that our praise is altogether imperfect. Psalm 8 is not a long psalm, but it is a completed, perfected, and perfect psalm. If we are short of strength, we cannot praise. If we do not have the extra strength, we cannot have a completed, perfected, and perfect praise. (Life-Study of Psalms, Chapter 5, Section 2)

I. The prayer of the age is the prayer of the church as the Body of Christ, as the one new man, the prayer that exercises the authority of Christ as the ascended Lord and Head of the Body to fulfill God's economy; to enter into this kind of prayer, we need a heavenly vision to see something that is far beyond our natural concept—Eph. 1:17:

A. We need to see the **meaning** of the **ascension** of Christ:

1. The ascension of Christ indicates that the entire **work of redemption** has been completely **accomplished**—Heb. 1:3; 10:12.
2. The ascension of Christ indicates that the **lordship** of Christ has been **established**—Acts 2:36:
 - a. Everything that the Lord has obtained and attained is being **transmitted** "to the church"—Eph. 1:19-23; 3:20-21.
 - b. We need to see the heavenly fact that Christ has been exalted by God, **established** as the **Lord** of the universe, and made **Head** over all things to the church; all things are under His feet, and everything that He has obtained and attained is being transmitted to the church, which is His Body—1:22-23.

When we enjoy Christ's **redemption** to the uttermost, we will be bold to praise the Lord. When we are discouraged and disappointed, we may sigh and groan. But **when we praise the Lord, this is the highest experience of our enjoyment of Christ**. The enjoyment of Christ will make us so strong to utter a complete and a perfected praise to the Lord. We all have to learn how to praise. This is the highest consummation that God has completed in His redemption through Christ. (Life-Study of Psalms, Chapter 5, Section 5)

- B. We need to see the church's **position** as the Body of Christ; because the church is the Body of Christ, the position of the church is **exactly the same** as that of Christ; since the Body is one with the Head, the position of the Body is exactly the same as that of the Head—1 Cor. 12:12, 27; Eph. 5:30.
- C. We need to see the **authority** of the church as the Body of Christ:
1. The authority of the Body is the authority of the Head **exercised** by the Body.
 2. As the church, the Body of Christ, we need to **assume** the authority of Christ—Matt. 28:18b-19a; Luke 10:19.

Every member of the Body **has** the **authority of the Head**. Every member of this Body is a part of the universal government. In this Body and joined to our ascended Head, we have the power, the authority, and the entire universe must respect us. All the demons and the evil spirits have to fear us. As the resurrected, pneumatic Christ, the Lord dealt with all the negative items in the universe and released Himself into us as our life. He **imparted** Himself into us **essentially** as our life to make us His living members. Another step was needed for Him to be exalted to be the authority of the universe, to be the **ascended, exalted Christ**. Then He poured Himself out as the exalted Christ upon us as authority to make us His **Body**, the **executing organ of the Head**. This Body connected to the Head is the government, the administration, of this universe. In the Body every member is a part of the universal authority. We are **qualified** and **equipped** to carry out the divine administration on this earth. With the pneumatic, ascended, exalted Christ as our heavenly uniform, we have the power and the authority to move and to work to accomplish God's eternal plan.

(God's New Testament Economy, Chapter 8, Section 1)

- D. We need to see the **prayer** of the church as the Body of Christ:
1. This kind of prayer is not the prayer of individual believers but the **prayer of the church as the Body of Christ**; physically, we may be praying in our room only by ourselves, but **spiritually, we are one with the Body**—cf. 1 Kings 8:48.
 2. In this kind of prayer, we **do not beg** the Lord to do something for us; instead, **we claim** what the Lord has obtained and attained:
 - a. Christ has **obtained** the lordship and the headship; He is the Lord and the Head over all things to the church.
 - b. Christ has **attained** the highest place in the universe; He has been raised from the dead and is seated at God's right hand in the heavenlies, far above all rule, authority, power, and lordship in the universe—Eph. 1:20-21.
 3. When we pray according to what the Lord has obtained in ascension, we may pray, "Lord, we do not go along with the present situation; as Your Body, **we take the ground** of Your ascension and claim Your lordship over the present situation."
 4. When we pray according to what the Lord has attained in ascension, we should **simply declare** who we are and where we are; we are in the Body, the Body is in the Head, and the Head is transcendent; if we have the vision that we are the Body of the Head and that the Head is now transcendent, we will take the ground to claim what the Lord has attained and tell all the negative things, "Do not bother me. Go to the lake of fire! I am transcendent. You cannot touch me. You are under my feet."
 5. Because the Body is one with the Head in the heavens, **the Body has the authority** to bind and loose what has already been bound and loosed in the heavens—Matt. 16:19; 18:18.
 6. The church is built upon a rock, and this rock is the ascended Christ; as a result, the **gates of Hades cannot prevail against the church**—16:18.
- E. To fully **enter** into this kind of prayer and be able to exercise the authority given by the Head to the Body, there are two things that we must realize:
1. We must realize that **we are members** of the Body, and we must **live, act, and move** in the Body; as an example, imprisonment did not isolate Paul from the Body of Christ or cut him off from the supply of the Body—Phil. 1:19.
 2. In our daily life **we must always put off the old man and put on the new man** by **being renewed in the spirit of our mind**; the new man is composed of the Head with the Body, Christ with the church—Eph. 4:22-24; 2:15-16.
- F. "We need to see the vision of the ascended Christ and learn to **pray the prayer of authority**. For two thousand years these matters have been neglected, but we believe that in these last days the Lord is going to recover them. Too often we do not take the ground of Christ's ascension and claim what He has obtained and attained. Nevertheless, we believe that the Lord will recover this lost ground. This is the highest peak, the highest mountain of the good land. In these last days the Lord will recover this highest peak, this highest mountain. We must realize the facts, take the ground, and claim what the Head has obtained and attained. This is the prevailing prayer of the church. This is the prayer of the age"—*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1963, vol. 1, p. 165.*

II. Praise is the highest work **carried out** by God's children:

- A. The highest **expression** of a saint's spiritual life is his praise to God.
- B. God's **throne** is the highest point in the universe, yet He sits "*enthroned / Upon the praises of Israel*"—Psa. 22:3.
- C. God's name and even God Himself are exalted through praise:
1. David **praised** God **seven times a day**; the Christian life soars through praises; to praise is to transcend everything to touch the Lord—119:164.
 2. David appointed Levites to play instruments to commemorate, **thank**, and **praise** God before the Ark of the Covenant of God—1 Chron. 16:4-6.
 3. When Solomon completed the building of Jehovah's temple, the priests brought the Ark of the Covenant of Jehovah into the Holy of Holies; when the priests came out of the Holy Place, the Levites stood beside the altar, **sounded** the trumpets, and **sang** with cymbals, harps, and lyres; together they **sounded praise to God**, and at that moment the **glory of Jehovah filled His house**—2 Chron. 5:7, 12-14.
 4. **We should praise the Lord all our life; we should sing praises to our God**—Psa. 146:2; *Hymns*, #717, #124, #166.
 5. When we, the many sons of God, meet as the church and praise the Father, the **firstborn Son sings hymns of praise** to the Father in our singing—Heb. 2:12.
- D. "*Through Him then let us offer up a sacrifice of praise continually to God, that is, the fruit of lips confessing His name*"—13:15:

1. The book of Psalms is, in fact, a book of praise in the Old Testament; however, the Psalms contain chapters not only of praises but also of sufferings; God wants His people to know that **the praising ones** are the very ones who **have been led through trying situations** and whose feelings have been wounded, yet God perfected praises out of these ones—8:1-2; 84:4-6; 42:7, 11; 45:1-2.
2. The **loudest praise** comes very often from the ones who are passing through hardships, adverse environments, and downtrodden feelings; this kind of praise is most pleasing to God and is blessed by Him—cf. 23:4.
3. The nature of praise is an offering, a sacrifice; in other words, **praise comes from pain, suffering, and loss**; God desires His children to praise Him through everything and in every situation—Heb. 13:15.

E. **Praise is the way to display Christ's victory** and overcome spiritual attacks:

1. The ultimate goal of Satan is to stop all praises to God; **prayer** signifies **spiritual warfare**, but **praise** signifies **spiritual victory**; whenever we praise, Satan flees.
2. *"About midnight Paul and Silas, while praying, sang hymns of praise to God; and the prisoners were listening to them"*—Acts 16:25:
 - a. Paul and Silas **offered the sacrifice of praise** in the jail; the wounds on their bodies were not yet healed, their pain was not soothed, their feet were in the stocks, and they were shut in an inner jail of the Roman Empire.
 - b. What was there to be joyful about? What was there to sing about? But there were two persons with **transcendent spirits**, who had surpassed everything; when they praised in such a way, the doors of the jail opened, the chains fell off, and even the jailer and his whole family were saved in a joyful way—vv. 19-34.
 - c. Whenever you run out of strength to pray and you find your spirit heavily oppressed, wounded, or sagging, praise Him; **if you cannot pray, try to praise**.
 - d. When you encounter unusual circumstances and problems and are bewildered and feel like collapsing, just remember one thing: "Why not praise?"; if you offer your praise at that moment, **God's Spirit will operate in you**, open all the doors, and break all the chains.
3. *"They rose up early in the morning and went out to the wilderness of Tekoa. And as they went out, Jehoshaphat stood up and said, Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem. Believe in Jehovah your God, and you will be established; believe in His prophets, and you will succeed. And when he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed them to sing to Jehovah and give thanks in holy array as they went out before the army and say, Give thanks to Jehovah, for His lovingkindness endures forever. And when they began to shout in song and to praise, Jehovah set ambushes for the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who were coming out against Judah; and they were struck"*—2 Chron. 20:20-22:
 - a. Please note the words **when they began**; this means that at the very moment when everyone was singing praises to Jehovah, He rose up to smite the Ammonites, Moabites, and the people of Mount Seir; **nothing moves the Lord's hand as quickly as praise**.
 - b. Every time you encounter a problem, you should pray for mercy that you would stop manipulating and plotting and that you would learn the lesson of praising instead; much warfare can be won by praise.
 - c. **Praise will last for eternity; it will never cease**—Rev. 5:8-14; 7:9-12; 14:1-3; 15:2-4; 19:1-8; cf. 21:6; 22:20.
 - d. A person who praises God transcends everything; he overcomes continually by his praise; this is a principle, and this is also a fact.
 - e. To praise is to glorify God; God is worthy of all glory; may God gain abundant praises from His children.

PRaising BEFORE UNDERSTANDING

Finally, in Psalm 50:23 God says, *"Whoever offers a sacrifice of **thanksgiving** glorifies Me."* Here, the word thanksgiving can also be translated as praise. **The Lord is waiting for our praises**. Nothing can glorify our God as praises can. One day, all the prayers, works, prophesying, and labor will be over. But on that day our praises will be more than today's. **Praise will last for eternity; it will never cease**. When we reach heaven and arrive at our final home, our praises will swell even higher. Today we have the opportunity to learn the best lesson; we can learn to praise God even today.

Today is still the time when we see in a mirror obscurely (1 Cor. 13:12). Although we can see a little of many things, we cannot understand the meaning behind them. We can only feel the pain of all the inward wounds and outward trials that we have encountered and experienced. We cannot comprehend the significance behind them. This is why we do not praise. We believe that praises will abound in heaven because there will be **full knowledge** in heaven. **The fuller the knowledge, the fuller the praise**. Everything will be clear when we go before the Lord on that day. **The things that are unclear to us today will be clear to us on that day**. On that day we will see the Lord's excellent will in every step of the Spirit's discipline. Had there been no discipline of the Spirit, we cannot imagine how much we would have fallen! If some of our footsteps had not been stopped by the Holy Spirit, we cannot imagine how pitiful our fall would have been! Many things, thousands and even millions of things which we do not see today, will become clear to us on that day. When we see everything on that day, we will bow our head and praise Him saying, "Lord, You were never wrong." **Every step of the Spirit's discipline is God's work in us**. Had we not become sick that one time, what would have become of us? Had we not failed that one time, what would have become of us? What we faced may have been a problem, but through facing that problem we may have avoided greater problems. What we encountered may have been a misfortune, but through that encounter we may have avoided greater misfortunes. **On that day we will see why the Lord allowed all these things to happen to us**. Today **the Lord is leading us on, every step of the way**. On that day we will bow our heads and say, *"Lord, I was a fool, because I did not praise You that day. I was a fool, because I did not give thanks to You that day."* When our eyes are opened and we become clear on that day, how very shameful we will be when we recall our murmurings. Therefore, today we must learn to say, *"Lord, I cannot understand what You are doing, but I know that You cannot be wrong."* **We have to learn to believe and to praise**. If we do, we will say on that day, *"Lord! I thank You for Your grace which saved me from unnecessary complaints and murmurings. Lord! I thank You for the grace which kept me from murmuring during those days."* For many things, the more knowledge we have, the greater will our praises be. We have a desire to praise the Lord because He is good (Psa. 25:8; 100:5). We need to always say, **"The Lord is good."** Today **we have to learn to believe that the Lord is good and that He is never wrong**, even though we cannot always understand what He is doing. If we believe, we will praise. **Our praises are His glory. To praise is to glorify God. God is worthy of all glory**. May God gain abundant praises from His children. (Messages for Building Up New Believers, Vol. 1, Chapter 17, Section 4)