

The Apostolic Ministry in Cooperation with Christ's Heavenly Ministry to Shepherd the Church of God as His Flock for the Building Up of the Body of Christ

In view of the eternal economy of God, there is the tendency through the whole writing of John to have the church of God issuing in the Body of Christ for the accomplishment of God's eternal economy. Its judicial section qualifies and positions the believers to carry out its organic section by the divine life of the processed and consummated Triune God. But today most Christians are just lingering in its judicial section and are satisfied with it, **paying very little attention** to its organic section and missing the critical point of the fulfillment of the eternal economy of God. The critical need of the Lord's recovery today is not to be held back by the satisfaction of its judicial section but to **press forward** to carry out its organic section so that there may be the possibility of accomplishing the eternal economy of God.

John 21 reveals the apostolic ministry in cooperation with Christ's heavenly ministry. After Christ ascended to the heavens, He began His heavenly ministry. In doing this He raised up a group of **His followers as His apostles** who could fully cooperate with Him. These apostles were commissioned by the ascended Christ to cooperate with Him to carry out God's New Testament economy. **What He was doing in the heavens, the apostles did on earth** to carry out His heavenly ministry.

The Gospel of John has twenty-one chapters, but it actually ends with chapter twenty. 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 (chapter 20); hence, chapter twenty-one 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 twenty-one, 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.

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 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 every one 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.

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 (John 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 this 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.**

Concluding Word

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. (*Excerpt from the Crystallization-study of the Gospel of John, p. 130-135*)