

THE UNIQUE WORK IN THE LORD'S RECOVERY

(Thursday—Afternoon Session)

Message Three

A Work in Ascension, by the Spirit, and in the Divine Stream

Scripture Reading: Acts 1:8-11, 22; 2:4, 33; 4:33; 5:31; 13:1-4

I. The unique work in the Lord's recovery is a work in ascension—Acts 1:9-11; 2:33; Eph. 1:22; 2:6:

- A. In His ascension Christ was enthroned and made the Head over all things in the universe; He is the Head, the Lord, the King, and the anointed One on the throne, having all the power and all the authority in the universe—1:22; Matt. 28:18:
 - 1. Because we were identified with Christ in His ascension, we also were brought into the heavens with Him—Eph. 2:6.
 - 2. God committed all authority in the universe to His resurrected and ascended Christ, and we are in Christ; therefore, we are in the heavens and on the throne with Christ.
 - 3. To Christ ascension is His enthronement; to us it is our position in the heavenlies on the throne.
- B. In His ascension Christ was brought into a new realm, into the heavens, where He has another living with another ministry; the Lord's living and ministry in the heavens are the content of the book of Acts—2:33-34, 36; 5:31.
- C. The subject of Acts concerns the propagation of the resurrected Christ, which is carried out by Christ in His ascension—1:9-11; 2:33; 4:33:
 - 1. The propagation of the resurrected Christ is carried out by the Lord from the throne in the heavens—1:22; 3:13, 15; 4:10.
 - 2. The ascension is the nature and the sphere of the Lord's work on earth; hence, the work of the Lord today in His recovery should have a heavenly nature and should be in a heavenly sphere—Eph. 1:22.
- D. Whereas much of today's so-called Christian work is not a work in ascension, the work in the Lord's recovery must be a work in the Lord's ascension; we should be able to testify that we are working in Christ's ascension—Acts 2:32-33.
- E. The ascended Christ has come into us in His ascension; He is in His ascension within us—Col. 1:27; 3:1; Rom. 8:10, 34:
 - 1. The Lord today is in our spirit in His ascension—2 Tim. 4:22.
 - 2. In Christ's ascension the Triune God moves in us, and this move becomes His history and also our history because He and we are mingled as one and have the same history—1 Cor. 6:17.

II. The unique work in the Lord's recovery is a work carried out by the Spirit—Acts 1:8; 2:4; 13:2, 9:

- A. There are two aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit: the inward aspect for life—the essential Spirit—and the outward aspect for power and authority—the economical Spirit—John 14:17; 20:22; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:5, 8:

1. Every believer in Christ should experience both aspects of the Spirit—Luke 24:49; John 14:17; 20:22:
 - a. Inwardly we need to drink of the Holy Spirit for life, and outwardly we need to be clothed with the Holy Spirit for power and authority—1 Cor. 12:13; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:5, 8.
 - b. Inwardly we need the breath of the Holy Spirit breathed into us for life, and outwardly we need the wind of the Holy Spirit blowing upon us for power—John 20:22; Acts 2:2, 4.
 - c. To experience the Spirit as our life for our spiritual being and existence is essential; to experience the Spirit as power for our spiritual work and function is economical—Rom. 8:11; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:5, 8.
 - d. Regarding the Spirit of life, we need to breathe Him in as the breath; regarding the Spirit of power, we need to put Him on as the uniform, typified by the mantle of Elijah—John 20:22; Luke 24:49; 2 Kings 2:9, 13-15.
2. As believers in Christ, we should experience both the inward and the outward filling of the Spirit—Eph. 5:18; Acts 2:4; 4:8; 6:3; 13:9, 52:
 - a. To be filled with the Spirit inwardly is to experience the essential Spirit as life—Eph. 5:18; Acts 6:3; 13:52.
 - b. To be filled with the Spirit outwardly is to experience the baptism in the Spirit for power and authority—1:5, 8; 2:4; 4:8; 13:9.
- B. “The Holy Spirit said, Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them”—v. 2b:
 1. Five faithful and seeking members of the Body of Christ gave the Head of the Body an opportunity through their ministering and fasting so that He, as the Spirit, might set them apart to carry out His great commission—vv. 1-2a.
 2. This was absolutely a move by the Spirit, in the Spirit, and with the Spirit through the coordination of the faithful and seeking members of the Body of Christ on the earth with the Head in the heavens—vv. 1-2:
 - a. This great step taken by the Lord for the spread of His kingdom was not a religious movement with a human schedule.
 - b. This work began without the organizing of a mission, without the raising of funds, without human ordination, and without any human plan or method—vv. 3-4.

III. The unique work in the Lord’s recovery is a work in the divine stream—Gen. 2:8-10; Rev. 22:1:

- A. In the Scriptures the concept of the divine stream, the unique flow, is crucial—Gen. 2:10-14; Psa. 46:4a; John 7:37-39; Rev. 22:1:
 1. The Bible reveals the flowing Triune God—the Father as the fountain of life, the Son as the spring of life, and the Spirit as the river of life—Jer. 2:13; Psa. 36:9a; John 4:14; 7:37-39.
 2. The source of the flow is the throne of God and of the Lamb—Rev. 22:1.
 3. In the Scriptures there is only one flow, only one divine stream; the divine stream, which has been flowing throughout the generations, is uniquely one—Gen. 2:10-14; Rev. 22:1.

- B. The divine stream, the unique flow, is a stream of fellowship—Acts 2:42; 1 John 1:3; 1 Cor. 10:16:
 - 1. The fellowship of the Body of Christ is the stream of the divine life; wherever the stream of life flows, there is the fellowship of the Body of Christ—Rev. 22:1.
 - 2. “The one thing that should rule us is the divine fellowship...By being restricted in this fellowship, the Body of Christ is kept in oneness, and the work of the ministry continues to go on...If we learn to fellowship, we will receive many benefits, especially in the Lord’s work” (*The Triune God to Be Life to the Tripartite Man*, pp. 145-146).
- C. The divine stream, the unique flow, is the stream of the Lord’s work—1 Cor. 16:10:
 - 1. There is a stream that we may call the stream, the current, of the work; where the stream flows, there is the work of God.
 - 2. The book of Acts shows us the divine stream, the unique flow; in the move of the Lord there is only one stream, and we need to keep ourselves in this one stream, the unique flow—Gen. 2:8-12; Rev. 22:1-2; Acts 2:33; cf. 15:35-41.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE LORD’S MINISTRY IN HIS ASCENSION

The Lord’s ascension was not the end of His activity. Rather, the Man-Savior’s ascension was another initiation. As we pointed out in the Life-study of Luke, Christ’s ascension was His inauguration, His initiation, into His heavenly ministry. The Lord’s conception was His first initiation, and His ascension was another initiation. His conception was the initiation of His life and ministry on earth; His ascension was the initiation of His living and ministry in the heavens. Hence, Christ’s ascension was not the termination of His activity; instead, it was His initiation into further activity— His ministry in the heavens.

The first book written by Luke, his Gospel, describes the Lord’s first initiation and His life and ministry on earth. Now there is the need of the second book, the book of Acts, to tell us into what kind of living and ministry the Lord has been initiated through His ascension. Therefore, Luke had the burden to write a second book to unveil the living and ministry of the ascended Christ. In Acts we see how the Lord lives and ministers in His ascension.

We would emphasize the fact that, according to the Gospel of Luke, the Lord lived on earth. That life and ministry were initiated by His conception and concluded by His resurrection. Then after His resurrection the Lord Jesus ascended to the heavens. This ascension was not a termination but another initiation. This initiation brought Him into a new realm, that is, into the heavens, where He now has another living with another ministry. This living and ministry are carried out not by the Jesus who was merely conceived of the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin and born in Bethlehem; it is carried out by the ascended Christ. The resurrected and ascended Christ is now living in the heavens and ministering there. The Lord’s living and ministry in the heavens are the content of the book of Acts. May we all be impressed with this picture at the outset of this *Life-study of Acts*. (*Life-study of Acts*, pp. 2-3)

CHRIST’S ACTIVITY IN HIS ASCENSION

The propagation of the resurrected Christ is carried out by Christ in His ascension. The Lord Jesus lived on earth for thirty-three and a half years, but now He is in ascension. In His ascension the Lord is very active. We should never think that the ascended Christ is sitting

passively on the throne, observing the pitiful situation on earth and feeling disappointed about it. No, in His ascension Christ is active in a very positive way. As the ascended One, He is now doing many things.

The case of the stoning of Stephen is an illustration of Christ's activity in His ascension. Speaking of Stephen, Acts 7:55 and 56 say, "Being full of the Holy Spirit, looking intently into heaven, he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." As the Lord was looking at the situation on earth in His ascension, He stood up. Perhaps He was saying, "You persecutors may stone Stephen and put him to death. But I will gain one of you—Saul of Tarsus—and make him much stronger than Stephen. What can you do about this? You do your stoning, and I do My observing. Wait for a period of time, and you will be defeated." Stephen's case illustrates that the resurrected Christ is very active in His ascension.

The fact that Christ is now in ascension means not only that He is in the heavens; it also means that He has power and authority. In His ascension Christ has all the power and all the authority in the universe. According to Matthew 28:18, the resurrected Christ said to His disciples, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." Therefore, with such authority and power in His ascension the Lord is very active. What is He doing? The Lord, as the ascended One, is carrying out His universal and eternal propagation.

Who can explain why the earth today is filled with Christians? Why are there so many believers in the world? Great men have tried to gain control of the earth, but they have failed. Hitler, for example, tried to do this, but eventually he lost everything. Napoleon, after he had been defeated, reportedly looked up to the heavens and confessed that Jesus had beaten him. Napoleon admitted that even though the Lord Jesus did not fight, He gained everything. The point here is that the whole earth is in the hands of the undefeatable One, and this One is carrying out His propagation.

A WORK IN ASCENSION

We have emphasized the fact that the subject of Acts is the propagation of the resurrected Christ in His ascension, by the Spirit, through the disciples, for the producing of the churches—the kingdom of God. We have seen something concerning the propagation of the resurrected Christ (2:24; 3:15; 5:30; 13:33). Now we need to see that this propagation is carried out by the Lord from the throne in the heavens. This means that His work of propagation is in ascension. However, much of today's so-called Christian work is not a work in ascension. We hope that the work in the Lord's recovery will be in His ascension. The ascension is the nature and the sphere of the Lord's work on earth. Therefore, the work of the Lord today should have a heavenly nature and should be in a heavenly sphere.

It is in His ascension that Christ is propagating Himself. We know that His ascension came after His death and resurrection. Christ's work in His ascension takes place in the nature of His resurrection. Therefore, this work is not natural; it does not have anything of the natural man. Rather, it is of the divine life in resurrection, and it is carried out in the atmosphere and condition of His ascension. Where are we working today? We all should be able to say that we are working in Christ's ascension.

BY THE SPIRIT

The propagation of the resurrected Christ in His ascension is by the Spirit. His propagation is not by any gimmick or human technique. But consider the situation among Christians today concerning the propagation of Christ. Where is the propagation by the Spirit? In many

instances, there is very little of the Spirit but much use of human methods and techniques. For example, some even use rock music in their preaching of the gospel. We need to realize that the propagation of the resurrected Christ is by the Spirit, in particular, the economical Spirit. In the book of Acts we see the economical Spirit for the carrying out of Christ's propagation. (*Life-study of Acts*, pp. 10-13)

The Speaking of the Lord as the Spirit

As they were ministering to the Lord in this way, He as the Spirit came in and spoke to them, saying, "Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 13:2). This indicates that here the Holy Spirit is the Lord.

However, many Christians think that the Spirit is separate from the Lord. Some even say that the Spirit is the agent or representative of the Lord. If the Spirit is merely the Lord's representative, then in 13:2 the Holy Spirit should not have said, "Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul." Instead, the Spirit should have said, "I, the Spirit, am an agent of the Lord. I represent the Lord and work for Him. Therefore, I do not say that you should set apart Barnabas and Saul unto Me. I tell you to separate Barnabas and Saul unto the Lord, for whom I am working."

In 13:2 we have the Lord, the Holy Spirit, and "Me." Who is this Me? Is this Me only the Holy Spirit and not the Lord? Surely the Me in this verse is the Lord.

The five prophets and teachers were ministering to the Lord. As they were ministering, the Lord as the Holy Spirit spoke to them. This corresponds to Paul's word: "And the Lord is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:17). Hence, the Spirit could tell them to separate Barnabas and Saul "for Me." This Me is both the Lord and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we should not think that the Holy Spirit is separate from the Lord. No, the Holy Spirit is the Lord to whom we minister. When we minister, we minister to the Lord. But when the Lord responds to us, He responds as the Holy Spirit. Because He is the Lord, He could say as the Holy Spirit, "Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul."

A Great Step Taken by the Lord for the Spread of the Gospel to the Gentile World

In 13:2 the Holy Spirit as the pneumatic Christ, the Head of the Body, told the five to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work to which He had called them. This was a giant step taken by the Lord for the spread of the gospel of His kingdom to the Gentile world. It was begun from Antioch, a Gentile center in Syria, without organizing a mission, without raising funds, without human ordination, and without any human plan and method. It was initiated by five faithful and seeking members of the Body, who afforded an opportunity, through their ministering and fasting, to the Head of the Body that He, as the Spirit, might set them apart to carry out His great commission to spread His kingdom for the establishment of His church in the Gentile world through the preaching of His gospel.

This major step had nothing to do with the church in Jerusalem organizationally, and it was not under the authority and direction of Peter and the other eleven apostles in Jerusalem. It was begun solely and purely from a Gentile center, far away from the atmosphere and influence of any Judaic background and practice, and even from the practice and influence of the church in Jerusalem. It was absolutely a move by the Spirit, in the Spirit, and with the Spirit through the coordination of the faithful and seeking members of the Body on earth with the Head in the heavens. This was not a religious movement with a human schedule. From Antioch the Lord's move on the earth for God's New Testament economy had an entirely new start. Although the flow of the Lord's move began from Jerusalem on the day of

Pentecost, and later came to Antioch and went on from Antioch to the Gentile world, it had a purified start by the Spirit at its turn in Antioch. (*Life-study of Acts*, pp. 306-307)

ACTING AND MOVING AS ONE BODY

The entire record of the book of Acts also shows us a group of people who always acted as the Body. From the very first chapter neither Peter, John, nor those one hundred twenty acted individually. Rather, all the actions of this group of people were the actions of the one Body. The one hundred twenty prayed together with one accord, and they received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, preached the gospel, bore the testimony of Jesus, and always moved and acted as one Body (1:14; 2:1, 4, 14, 46-47). From chapter 1 to chapter 28 the actions of this group of people were the actions of one Body.

It is difficult to find anyone among them who acted individualistically. Although it appears that Philip preached the gospel by himself in chapter 8 when he was in Samaria, it was Peter and John who came to confirm his preaching (vv. 5, 14-17). The Holy Spirit, the power upon the Body, did not come upon those believers through Philip's preaching. It was when Peter and John came and laid hands on the Samaritan believers that the Holy Spirit on the Body was transmitted to them. This proves that even Philip's preaching was not an individual action. His preaching was related to the move of the Body. Therefore, chapter after chapter in Acts records the move and activity of the Body, not of individual believers.

The activities recorded in Acts were not only of the Body but also for the Body, that is, for the building up of the church. No one acted in a way that had nothing to do with the Body. Rather, everyone acted in a way that was for the building up of the Body. The issue and result of what they did was the building up of the church. The activities in this book are absolutely different from the movements of today's Christianity. Many in today's Christianity act in a way that is not of the Body or for the Body. As we have seen, Acts is a record of a group of people who act and work all the time for the Body and through the Body. Therefore, in this book the churches are built up out of the activities of those people. Acts contains a beautiful picture of the one accord in the activities, work, and move of the believers. They always moved in the Body and for the Body.

MOVING, ACTING, AND WORKING IN ONE DIVINE FLOW

Lastly, this book shows us a divine stream, a divine current. This stream flows from the throne in the heavens (Rev. 22:1). What happened in the book of Acts is the same as the picture in Revelation 22. From the throne of God and of Christ, the enthroned Lamb, the flow began, and in the book of Acts it flowed to the earth, beginning from the first station, Jerusalem. All the members of the Body of Christ were in this flow. As this flow proceeded, they simply moved in the current of this flow. This flow eventually went to Antioch (Acts 11:19-21). Antioch became a turning point for the flow to move from the east to the west. From Antioch the flow turned westward across the Aegean Sea, between Asia Minor and Macedonia in the eastern part of Europe, and from that sea the flow reached Europe (16:10-12). From there, the Lord's move went onward to western Europe and Rome (28:14, 30-31). We can draw a line to trace the flow all the way from Jerusalem to Antioch, westward across the sea to eastern Europe, and from there to the middle part of Europe, including Rome.

The divine stream moved westward rather than toward the east. To understand this, we must know the history, geography, and civilization of the time. At that time it was difficult for people to go eastward. There was no way to turn but toward the west. History tells us that the Roman Empire built many highways. Moreover, there was much traffic on the Mediterranean Sea, and it was very easy for people to sail from Palestine to the west. Not only so, there

was much intermingling of the people, and their language and even citizenship were brought together. There was no need to obtain a permit to travel. As long as someone was a Roman citizen, he could travel throughout the entire Mediterranean area. In this way all the different countries became one under the Roman Empire.

Beginning from Jerusalem in Acts 2 there was only one flow on this earth, and all the early disciples moved, acted, and worked in the flow. There were not two currents in the flow, but always one. All those who were raised up by the Lord sooner or later were brought into the flow. While the flow proceeded westward, believers such as Aquila, Priscilla, Apollos, and others were raised up by the Lord and brought into this one stream (18:2, 24-28).

There is no record of more than one stream. Barnabas was in this one flow up to a certain point; after that he was separated from the flow (15:35-39). Following this, there is no further record of Barnabas in the book of Acts, because he was no longer in the flow. There was only one stream, one current, of the flow. The flow was not like today's turnpikes, which branch in every direction and confuse people. In the New Jerusalem there is only one flow, one way.

Today there are many works that are not in the one flow, as exemplified by the work of Barnabas. The work of Barnabas was not in the flow, whereas the work of the apostle Paul and his co-workers was. We may do a work for the Lord, yet our work may not be in the one divine flow. Throughout the entire history of the church there has always been a situation that some of the Christian work was in this unique flow, but many works were not in the flow, even though these works were for the Lord. The work of Roman Catholicism, for example, is a work for the Lord, but it is not in the one flow. The work in the flow is the work of the Lord's present testimony. (*A General Sketch of the New Testament in the Light of Christ and the Church, Part 1: The Gospels and the Acts*, pp. 90-92)