

THE CRUCIAL POINTS OF THE MAJOR ITEMS OF THE LORD'S RECOVERY TODAY

(Friday—Second Morning Session)

Message Five

The Eternal Life

Scripture Reading: Matt. 7:13-14; 2 Cor. 3:6; Rev. 22:1-2

- I. The way of the Lord's recovery is the way of the eternal, divine life; we need to know the intrinsic essence of life in the Lord's recovery—Psa. 16:11; Jer. 21:8; John 1:4; 10:10b; 14:6; 1 Cor. 15:45b:**
 - A. The intrinsic essence of the Triune God is the eternal, divine life—God the Father is the source of life (John 5:26), God the Son is the embodiment of life (1:4), and God the Spirit is the flow of life (4:14b; 7:38-39a).
 - B. The intrinsic essence of the New Jerusalem is the eternal, divine life—God the Father is the light of life (Rev. 21:23; 22:5), God the Son is the tree of life (v. 2), and God the Spirit is the river of water of life (v. 1).
 - C. God builds the church to prepare the bride of Christ for the building of the New Jerusalem by the eternal, divine life, the resurrection life—the flowing, transforming, and building life—Gen. 2:22; John 19:34; Psa. 36:8-9.
- II. The eternal life, the life of the Triune God, is dispensed into the tripartite man to save the believers subjectively in this life through regeneration, sanctification, renewing, transformation, conformation, and glorification—Rom. 5:10b; 8:2, 10, 6, 11:**
 - A. First, this life was the divine life in the Spirit—v. 2.
 - B. Second, it became the life in our spirit through regeneration—v. 10.
 - C. Then from our spirit it saturates our mind for the transformation of our soul, to which our mind belongs, and becomes the life in our soul—v. 6.
 - D. Eventually, it will permeate our body, ultimately issuing in the transfiguration of our body, that is, the redemption of our body—vv. 11, 23; Phil. 3:21.
- III. The unique way for the daily life of God's people and for their fellowship with God and with one another is the divine life flowing in the divine nature—Rev. 21:21b; 22:1-2; 1 John 1:3:**
 - A. The street of the holy city is pure gold, symbolizing the divine nature, and the river of water of life proceeds in the middle of the street—Rev. 21:21b; 22:1.
 - B. Where the divine life flows, there the divine nature is as the holy way by which God's people walk; and where the holy way of the divine nature is, there the divine life is flowing—2 Pet. 1:4; John 7:38-39a.
 - C. The street connected to and coming out of the throne is a "fellowship street"; the divine fellowship brings God to all His redeemed people in order to bring them back to Himself as their throne for His golden administration within them—Rev. 21:18b; 22:1-2; 21:21b; cf. Ezek. 1:22, 26; 1 Kings 10:18.
 - D. When we walk and move in the divine nature of God, we are brought under

God's golden administration to enjoy the flow of life and the supply of life—
Rev. 22:1-2.

IV. We should live according to the principle of the tree of life, the principle of dependence, not according to the principle of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the principle of independence—Gen. 2:9, 17; Rom. 8:6:

- A. That God is our food, signified by the tree of life, means that we must depend on God continually; the tree of knowledge indicates independence.
- B. Knowledge or religion means to be good and to do good, to worship God or to work for God, without having the living presence of God—John 5:39-40; 15:5b.
- C. In the eyes of God, the greatest sin is independence; independence is a spiritual insulation, disconnecting us from the life of God—Eph. 4:18.
- D. We must learn to depend on the Lord continually, living constantly in direct contact with God—2 Cor. 1:12; Heb. 11:8; Matt. 6:28; cf. 1 Kings 7:17-19; S. S. 8:5a; cf. 2 Chron. 16:12; Isa. 50:10-11.

V. In our service to the Lord, we must reject our natural enthusiasm, natural strength, and natural ability; our service must be life flowing out of us as a ministry of life to others—John 7:38; 2 Cor. 3:6; 1 John 5:16a:

- A. We must be burning in spirit with the fire of God's life; we should not serve with strange fire, signifying the natural enthusiasm not dealt with by the cross and not in resurrection—Exo. 3:2; Luke 12:49-50; Rom. 12:11; Lev. 10:1:
 - 1. Strange fire in the priestly service, a sin of presumption, causes death before God—9:24; 10:1-2.
 - 2. The offering of strange fire might have been related to the drinking of wine; drinking wine signifies the overenjoyment of the worldly, natural, or physical, material things—vv. 8-9.
 - 3. When the priests are drunk, they lose the discernment of holiness and are unable to teach God's people—vv. 10-11.
- B. Our natural strength and ability need to be dealt with by the cross to become useful in resurrection for our service to the Lord—Phil. 3:3:
 - 1. After being put aside by God for forty years, Moses learned to serve God according to His leading and to trust in Him—Exo. 2:14-15; Acts 7:22-36; Heb. 11:28.
 - 2. After becoming a complete failure, Peter learned to serve the brothers by faith and with humility—Luke 22:32-33; John 18:15-18, 25-27; Matt. 26:69-75; 1 Pet. 5:5-6.

VI. In the decree of the kingdom's constitution, Christ displayed the two possible ways of people's life and work before God—Matt. 7:13-14, 21-27:

- A. The broad way leading to destruction is according to the worldly systems, satisfying the natural tastes, to get the crowd, to maintain a career of man, and to achieve man's enterprise—13:31-33; Rev. 2:13, 20; 17:4-5.
- B. The constricted way leading to life is according to the divine regulations, fulfilling the spiritual requests to bring in God's elect and to bear the testimony of Jesus Christ, carrying out God's economy for the building up of the Body of Christ—Rom. 1:9; Heb. 11:5-6; Rev. 1:1-2, 9-10.

- C. The way that leads to a living reward in life is the Way (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:22)—the way of the truth, the straight way, the way of righteousness (2 Pet. 2:2, 15, 21), the way of peace (Luke 1:79; Rom. 3:17), the way of salvation (Acts 16:17), the way of God (Matt. 22:16; Acts 18:26), and the way of the Lord (John 1:23; Acts 18:25); it is slandered as the way of heresy (24:14).
- D. The God-ordained way is to have a living and working that are always narrow and constricted, according to the pattern of the Lord's indescribable life and ministry—John 5:19; 4:34; 17:4; 14:10, 24; 5:30; 7:6, 18:
1. We in the Lord's recovery must walk in our spirit; walking in spirit restricts us, causing us to live a normal, Christian life and making us vital, healthy believers—Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:16, 22-23; 1 Thes. 5:16-18.
 2. The Lord Jesus sowed Himself as a seed of life and fell into the ground as a grain of wheat so that the life within Him could be released to bring forth many grains; we need to serve Him and follow Him in this way—Matt. 13:3; John 12:23-26; 10:11; 1 John 3:16.
 3. The work that the Lord needs to produce and increase the church is the overflow and outflow of the inner life, not the endeavor of outward activity—John 7:37-39; 4:10, 14:
 - a. The important thing regarding our work is not its quantity but its quality; gold, silver, and precious stones are always small in quantity but high in quality, whereas wood, grass, and stubble are always high in quantity but low in quality—1 Cor. 3:12-15:
 - 1) Gold symbolizes God in His divine nature, silver symbolizes Christ in His redemptive work, and precious stones symbolize the Spirit in His transforming work.
 - 2) Wood signifies the human nature, grass signifies man in the flesh, and stubble signifies lifelessness.
 - b. We will be judged at the judgment seat of Christ not according to the quantity but according to the quality of our work, "of what sort it is"—v. 13.
 - c. "Because Watchman Nee was not interested in the outward work, the life-issue of his ministry has flowed throughout the whole earth...In my whole life, he is the only person I have known who paid more attention to life than to work" (*Watchman Nee—a Seer of the Divine Revelation in the Present Age*, by Witness Lee, p. 87).

Excerpts from the Ministry:

**THE DECREE OF THE KINGDOM'S CONSTITUTION
FOR REGULATING GOD'S PEOPLE'S LIFE AND WORK**

In this message we want to fellowship about the narrow gate and the constricted way. In Matthew 7:13-14 the Lord said, "Enter in through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter through it. Because narrow is the gate and constricted is the way that leads to life, and few are those who find it." The human thought is that we first walk the way and then enter through the gate. But the divine way, God's way, is to enter in through the gate and then walk on the way.

This word is in the Lord's decree of the kingdom's constitution recorded in Matthew 5—7. Nearly all the Christian teachers refer to this as "the Sermon on the Mount." But I do not

like the word *sermon*. The Lord was not a professor, giving the people a sermon or a lecture. He is the King. The New Testament opens by presenting to us the kingdom. It is not just the kingdom of God but the kingdom of the heavens.

After a long period of time in the Old Testament through thirty-nine books, the New Testament came to present us the first item on the heart of God. This first item is the kingdom, not just the kingdom of God but the kingdom of the heavens. Regretfully, many Christian teachers do not know how to discern between these two aspects of the kingdom. The first aspect of the kingdom is the kingdom of God. That is somewhat general. But the second aspect is the kingdom of the heavens. This is neglected and nearly missed by most Bible teachers. If you go to them and ask them what the difference is between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the heavens, they will say that they are the same. But if you know the book of Matthew, you can see that Matthew stresses the aspect of the kingdom of the heavens to the uttermost. *Kingdom of the heavens* is a term used exclusively by Matthew, indicating that the kingdom of the heavens differs from the kingdom of God. Matthew mentions the kingdom of God only four times (12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43). But all the way through the twenty-eight chapters of Matthew, the *kingdom of the heavens* is mentioned repeatedly (see note 3⁴ on Matthew 5:3 in the Recovery Version for the denotation of the *kingdom of the heavens*).

The four Gospels present to us a Savior of four sides. He is a “square” Savior. The New Jerusalem is not round but square (Rev. 21:16), and our Savior is also square. If you are a “round” man, you are crafty. We all need to be square like our Savior. Even the universe has four directions: north, south, east, and west. Christ has only four sides. In Matthew He is the King; in Mark He is the Slave; in Luke He is the Man; and in John He is God.

Matthew presents to us the first aspect of Christ. Chapters one through four of Matthew are an introduction. After this introduction the King came. He went to the mountain and in chapters five through seven gave the decree of the constitution of the kingdom which He was going to establish. Matthew 7:13-14 is a little part of this constitution decreed by our King in His kingdom.

Some of us may wonder why I am sharing this in our vital group training. We need to see that the decree of the kingdom’s constitution is altogether a matter of regulating God’s people’s life and work. When I use the word *life*, I mean *living*, and when I use the word *work*, I mean *working*. I am not referring to just our life within but to our living without, our daily living. God’s people’s living and working should be something organic according to the divine regulations fulfilling the spiritual requests. This is fully revealed in the decree of our King in His kingdom’s constitution.

BEING REGULATED ACCORDING TO THE PRINCIPLES OF LIFE IN ORDER TO BE HEALTHY, NORMAL, VITAL BELIEVERS

Our vital groups are not wild or reckless. We should be well regulated. If we are not well regulated, we can never be living and vital. If you ask a healthy person why he is healthy, he will tell you that it is because he takes care of the principles of life. A healthy person, for example, will not work at night but during the day. George Müller said that he would not even travel at night. He said that if you travel in the day, that is healthy; but if you travel in the night, that is unhealthy. To sleep at night from 10 P.M. to 6 A.M. is very healthy. But to sleep during the day is unhealthy. This is a life principle.

God made the heavens and the earth, and He also ordained the night and the day. The night is very important, so it came first. The evening and the morning are one day in Genesis 1 (v. 5). For your health, the night is important. If you take care of your night in a wise way, you will be healthy. Still there are a number of jobs in our society which require people

to be on duty at night. We have to thank the nurses and the policemen who do their duty at night, sacrificing themselves for others. But according to the God-ordained principle, the night is for us to sleep, and the day is for our living and working.

Healthy people will tell you that they are regulated according to the principles of life. Each one of these principles regulates us. If we eat too fast, we will suffer. Neither should we eat too slow. That is not healthy eating. Healthy eating must be moderate, neither too fast nor too slow, in order to satisfy the inner feeling of our body. When we take care of the principles of life in the human realm, this makes us vital physically.

We are being trained to be vital. But in our concept, we think that to be vital is to be like Samson. Samson, however, was not vital. He did not live long. He even had to commit a kind of suicide by sacrificing himself in order to kill others (Judg. 16:30). On the other hand, Boaz was very vital. He was a regular person. In the past summer training, we pointed out that we cannot see anything of life in Judges. But the book of Ruth, a book of four chapters, is a book of life. I believe that if that book were written today, the writer could get a Nobel Prize. That is a marvelous short novel full of life. Boaz was a healthy person; he was vital. Some powerful Pentecostal preachers were immoral, and yet they were powerful. They were like Samson.

Do you want to be like Samson or like Boaz? We surely want to be like Boaz, a person who was regulated according to the life principles. He was a vital person. Who brought Christ to you? Samson is not in the lineage of Christ. But Boaz is a most important link in the lineage of Christ (Matt. 1:5). Christ could come to us because of Boaz. This is what it means to be vital.

When I was looking to the Lord for this message, the Lord impressed me, "Tell the saints who love Me and who want to be vital something about the narrow gate and the constricted way." To be vital should not be a miracle. The trees do not grow in a miraculous way. We planted many small trees around the meeting hall in Anaheim seventeen years ago, but today they are all big. Their growth was according to the principles of life. God ordained these principles.

We are being trained in the God-ordained way revealed in the Bible. The God-ordained way is to have a living and a working which are always narrowed and constricted. The gate is narrow and the way is constricted that leads to life. But the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction. In the spiritual field, there is no broad way. The way in the spiritual field is always constricted. On this way our freedom is always restricted.

Every tree is restricted. If all the trees grew without restriction, that would be a calamity. But all the trees grow and spread in the way of constriction. The trees need the God-ordained constriction plus the human cutting, the human trimming. The trimming is human. The constriction is God-ordained. Even though the trees are constricted according to God's ordination, they still need the human hands to trim them.

In the spiritual realm, we also need the trimming. A miracle is not mentioned in John 15 concerning the bearing of fruit, but trimming is strongly referred to by the Lord. Are you going to bring forth fruit? You need to be trimmed, pruned (v. 2). To be trimmed is to be constricted. We should not spread too much. We should not be wild but constricted.

We may wonder why we cannot see much bearing of fruit among us. The fruit of life does not come by means of a miracle. We need to see that the more we are constricted, the more we are regulated. The more we are regulated, the more we are healthy. Then we are ready to bear fruit. Fruit comes out of our health. A sick tree cannot bear fruit. Living things that are sick cannot produce. God's ordination is for living things such as the trees to grow vitally. We Christians should also be growing vitally. To be vital means to be healthy. We need

to be healthy and normal. We should not expect to get many persons saved. We should always be prepared to bear one remaining fruit a year. We should pray, "Lord, give me one fruit per year, remaining fruit, healthy fruit, fruit that is healthy just as I am."

We might think that the apostle Paul would bring thousands to the Lord, but we can see in Paul's history that this was not the case. In Colossians 1:28-29 Paul said that he labored to announce Christ, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom that he might present every man full-grown in Christ. He desired to admonish every man, teach every man, and present every man. The "every man" work could never be a miracle. Paul was the biggest gift, so we may think he would do everything miraculously. But the Bible tells us that Paul was not able to do that many miracles. Paul was not one who depended upon miracles. He was one who labored all the time.

In Acts 20 we see that he was with the saints in Ephesus for three years. He said that he served the Lord and admonished each one of the saints with tears (vv. 19, 31). Tears indicate much hardship and difficulty. He said that he admonished the saints "night and day" (v. 31). He taught publicly in the meetings and from house to house (v. 20). He taught publicly, but his work was much more in the "every man" way. He was not just giving lectures. Paul tutored each one of the saints.

A person who is always soaring in the air cannot bear remaining fruit. Perhaps he will say that he gained three last week and two more this week, but after a year he will not gain one as remaining fruit. He may say, "Well, last week I got two. Eventually, I realized they were not so good, so I gave them up. Now I have found some better ones." Eventually, however, not one is better, and everyone has to be discarded. The mothers are not like this. Every mother loves her child regardless of the child's appearance or behavior.

T. Austin-Sparks knew this quite well. He came to visit us in Taiwan for the first time in 1955. He said, "Every mother loves her child. If you are wise, don't say anything bad about her child. Otherwise, you will offend her." Once a mother brought her child to him, and this child was not so attractive. But he dared not to say that before the mother. The mother handed over the child to him, and he felt he had to say something. He said, "Oh, what a child!" This was a neutral saying, but this caused the mother to think, "My, what a child I have." To a mother, all her children are good. We need such a mother's heart (1 Thes. 2:7). Concerning a new one, we should not say, "He is not good material; I am sure he could never be like the apostle Paul." If we have such an attitude, we will not be able to bear remaining fruit.

We should not work on that many people. Instead, we should always keep just three or four under our hand. We must learn to restrict ourselves in our labor. The Lord's constitution in Matthew tells us we have to enter. Then we have to walk. We should not think that we do not need to work too much, since we should not contact too many. This would mean that we have stopped entering the narrow gate and walking on the constricted way. This is against the kingdom constitution to the uttermost. The Lord's constitution of His kingdom is that we have to enter and then walk. We have to work.

When I say that we should not spread too much, I do not mean that we should not work. Rather, we have to work every day. A good student prepares his lessons every day and does a little bit every day. The problem with us is that we do not work regularly. After being in the training concerning the vital groups, we still may not have started the vital work. We may say that we do not feel that we are vital and that we will work when we become vital. But this is wrong. If we do not work, we can never be vital. If we would work, then we would be vital.

What is it to be vital? To be vital is to be common. We Christians should be common in a living way. We should always contact the Lord, trying our best to remain in our spirit, doing

everything according to the spirit, and praying unceasingly. This makes us a common believer, a vital believer. I can testify that without a certain amount of prayer, I cannot give a message. The message comes out of my common prayer. If we do not have a time to be with the Lord in the morning to have some prayer, we will become weak and down. The only way to rise up is to pray, "Lord, forgive me and cleanse me. Lord, anoint me." Taking care of the life principles makes us vital.

We should carry out what God has ordained. God ordained that we should bear fruit. God ordained that we should contact people for His kingdom's sake. This is God's ordination, and we have to carry it out. If we do not carry out God's ordination, we can never be common. Instead, we will be abnormal Christians. Physically speaking, we must breathe, eat, sleep, and exercise properly if we want to be normal and healthy. If we do not take care of these things, it is impossible for us to be healthy. To be vital simply means to be healthy, and to be healthy we need to breathe, to pray. We have to eat and drink the Lord. We also need to exercise to do something. At least we need to go out twice a week to contact people. This is God's ordination, and we have to carry it out. We also need to rest. To sleep means to rest in the Lord. Do not think that to be vital is a miracle. To be vital is just to be common, to be normal.

Over thirty years ago, a brother told me that every time he saw me, I was so fresh. He wondered how I could be like this. If I do not pray and touch the Lord in my spirit, I can never be fresh. Instead, I will be stale. The key to my being fresh is that I contact the Lord. This causes me to lead a normal Christian life, to become vital. Often I pray for the churches around the globe. If I do not pray, I feel abnormal. Vitality comes from our being normal, common.

Now that we have had some training in the vital groups, we must take action. We should not wait. We must do our duty to carry out God's ordination. If we do this, be assured that we will bear at least one remaining fruit yearly. All the life principles are implied in John 15. Bearing fruit is a normal situation of a branch of the vine tree.

We need to practice what we have seen in a common way. Then we will be vital, and we will see the Lord's blessing following us. In these days I am so grateful to the Lord that His blessing has been following me for so many years. From my hometown, Chefoo, I went to Shanghai. From Shanghai I traveled through the provinces of China. Eventually, I was sent to Taiwan. From Taiwan I went to the Philippines and to southeastern Asia. Then I came to the United States. For more than sixty years, I have seen the Lord's blessing following me. If the Lord's blessing can be with me, it surely can be with all of us. If the Lord's blessing is not with us, we are abnormal; we are not vital. We must learn to enter through the narrow gate and then to walk on the constricted way. Thank the Lord for His constriction.

We should not expect to be flourishing and spreading in an unrestricted way. Our going to Russia was not our kind of flourishing. It was the Lord's doing. We have seen the Lord's constriction even in our going to Russia. When we drive on the highway, we have to drive within the lines. That is constriction. If we do not drive in this way, we will damage ourselves and others.

Do not expect to be big. You need to be restricted. The environment in the church life narrows us down and restricts us. We have to enter through the narrow gate and walk on the constricted way. Do not expect to do a big work and to become a great person. Just live normally, commonly, always entering through the narrow gate and walking on the constricted way. Then be assured that you will bear remaining fruit each year. Also, many saints will be helped by you to pass through the narrow gate and walk on the constricted way.

I have been working for the Lord for over sixty years. Nearly every day I am learning to

enter through the narrow gate and to walk on the constricted way. I want to be constricted. I do not want to maintain a career of man to achieve man's enterprise. Instead, I want to bear the testimony of Jesus Christ to carry out God's economy. We should live a normal, common Christian life, seeking after the Lord and pursuing Him all the time. Always exercise to enter through the narrow gate and to walk on the constricted way. (*The Training and the Practice of the Vital Groups*, pp. 139-147)