

RETURNING TO THE ORTHODOXY OF THE CHURCH

(Thursday—First Morning Session)

Message One

The Vision of the Glorious Christ as the Son of Man Walking in the Midst of the Golden Lampstands

Scripture Reading: Rev. 1:10—2:1

- I. If we are going to see the vision of the glorious Christ and of the seven churches in Revelation 1—3, we must care for the following things:**
- A. We must take the position of a slave—1:1:
 - 1. Paul says that he was a “slave of Christ Jesus” (Rom. 1:1); his use of this term indicates that he was not a self-appointed apostle or one hired by the Lord; rather, he was one purchased to serve God and minister Christ to His people, not in the natural life but in the regenerated life.
 - 2. We need to be willing to serve others as a servant, even as a slave, rather than rule over others—Matt. 20:24-28; 25:14; 2 Cor. 4:5; Gal. 6:17; Exo. 21:1-6; Isa. 50:4-5.
 - 3. Christ served us in the past (Mark 10:45), He is still serving us in the present (Luke 22:26-27), and He is going to serve us in the future (12:37; Rev. 7:17); if we are going to serve others with Christ, we need to allow Him to serve us first.
 - B. We must exercise our human spirit as the organ for us to see, realize, and respond to God’s move; only spirit can respond to Spirit—1:10; 4:5; 5:6; Psa. 119:17-18.
 - C. We must have an ear to hear what the Spirit is speaking to the churches:
 - 1. Seeing depends upon hearing; John first heard the voice (Rev. 1:10) and then saw the vision (vv. 11-12); if our ears are heavy and cannot hear, we cannot see (Isa. 6:9-10).
 - 2. The Lord always wants to open our ears to hear His voice (Job 33:14-16; Isa. 50:4-5; Exo. 21:6) so that we may see things according to His economy.
 - 3. The heavy ears need to be circumcised—Jer. 6:10; Acts 7:51.
 - 4. The sinners’ ears need to be cleansed with the redeeming blood and anointed with the Spirit—Lev. 14:14, 17, 28.
 - 5. To serve the Lord as priests, we must have our ears cleansed with the redeeming blood—Exo. 29:20; Lev. 8:23-24.
- II. The book of Revelation is the unique and ultimate revelation of Jesus Christ—1:1a:**
- A. John was exiled to the island of Patmos because he was faithful to God’s word and because he was for the testimony of Jesus; under such circumstances the glorious Christ revealed Himself to John and gave him new revelations—v. 9.
 - B. The earth had diminished before John’s eyes, but heaven was opened to him; this brings to mind Joseph who was in prison, Moses who was in the wilderness,

David who was in distress, and Paul who was in chains; they all received fresh revelations.

- C. John was going down the path that they had trodden; he received visions that he had never received before, and he came to know the enthroned Lord whom he had never known before; it is unfortunate that God's children often misunderstand God's ordained "Patmos."

III. Christ as the Son of Man is the High Priest, "clothed with a garment reaching to the feet, and girded about at the breasts with a golden girdle" (v. 13), to cherish the churches in His humanity and nourish them in His divinity:

- A. The Son of Man is in His humanity, the golden girdle signifies His divinity, and breasts are a sign of love:
 - 1. Christ was girded at the loins, strengthened for the divine work (Exo. 28:4; Dan. 10:5) to produce the churches, but now He is girded about at the breasts, caring for the churches that He has produced by His love.
 - 2. The golden girdle signifies Christ's divinity as His divine energy, and the breasts signify that this golden energy is exercised and motivated by and with His love to nourish the churches.
- B. Christ takes care of the churches in His humanity as the Son of Man to cherish them—Rev. 1:13a:
 - 1. He dresses the lamps of the lampstands to make them proper, cherishing us that we may be happy, pleasant, and comfortable—Exo. 30:7; 27:20-21; cf. Psa. 42:5, 11:
 - a. The Lord's presence provides an atmosphere of tenderness and warmth to cherish our being, giving us rest, comfort, healing, cleansing, and encouragement.
 - b. We can enjoy the cherishing atmosphere of the Lord's presence in the church to receive the nourishing supply of life—Eph. 5:29; cf. 1 Tim. 4:6; Eph. 4:11.
 - 2. He trims the wicks of the lamps of the lampstand, cutting off all the negative things that frustrate our shining—Exo. 25:38:
 - a. The charred part of the wick, the snuff, signifies things that are not according to God's purpose which need to be cut off, such as our flesh, our natural man, our self, and our old creation.
 - b. He trims away all the differences among the churches (the wrongdoings, shortages, failures, and defects) so that they may be the same in essence, appearance, and expression—cf. 1 Cor. 1:10; 2 Cor. 12:18; Phil. 2:2.
- C. Christ takes care of the churches in His divinity with His divine love, signified by the golden girdle on His breasts, to nourish the churches—Rev. 1:13b:
 - 1. He nourishes us with Himself as the all-inclusive Christ in His full ministry of three stages so that we may grow and mature in the divine life to be His overcomers to accomplish His eternal economy.
 - 2. As the walking Christ, He gets to know the condition of each church, and as the speaking Spirit, He trims and fills the lampstands with fresh oil, the supply of the Spirit—2:1, 7.
 - 3. To participate in His move and enjoy His care, we must be in the churches.

- IV. The heavenly ancientness of the Lord is depicted by His head and hair being white as white wool, as snow—1:14; Dan. 7:9; Job 15:10; cf. S. S. 5:11:**
- A. The Lord Jesus is God (John 20:28-29); He is beyond time, and He encompasses time (Micah 5:2; Isa. 57:15).
 - B. White hair signifies experience, glory, durability, as well as holiness—Prov. 16:31; 20:29.
 - C. Isaiah mentions God’s promise to cleanse man’s sin until it is like wool and as white as snow (1:18); when we consider how our sins have been cleansed and that we are as white as the head and hair of the Lord, we cannot help but marvel at the greatness of the Lord’s grace!
- V. The Lord’s seven eyes are as a flame of fire for watching, observing, searching, judging by enlightening, and infusing—Rev. 1:14; 5:6; Dan. 10:6:**
- A. Christ’s eyes are for God’s move and operation on earth, since seven is the number for completion in God’s move.
 - B. The Lord’s eyes being like a flame of fire is mainly for His judgment—7:9-10; Rev. 2:18; 19:11-12.
 - C. “Unto the judgment seat of Christ / I daily look away; / May all my living and my work / Abide the fire that day”—stanza 5 of a hymn written by Watchman Nee (*Watchman Nee—a Seer of the Divine Revelation in the Present Age*, p. 75).
- VI. The Lord’s feet are like shining bronze, as having been fired in a furnace, signifying that His perfect and bright walk qualifies Him to exercise divine judgment—Rev. 1:15; Ezek. 1:7; Dan. 10:6; cf. Exo. 30:18; 38:8; Num. 21:8-9.**
- VII. The Lord’s voice is like the sound of many waters (Rev. 1:15; cf. 14:2), which is a tumultuous sound, the sound of the voice of the Almighty God (Ezek. 1:24; 43:2) in its seriousness and solemnity (cf. Rev. 10:3).**
- VIII. Christ is the Holder of the bright messengers of the churches—1:16a, 20:**
- A. The messengers are the spiritual ones in the churches, the ones who bear the responsibility of the testimony of Jesus.
 - B. The messengers, who are of the heavenly nature and in a heavenly position like stars, are those who have a fresh message from the Lord to His people—2:1a.
 - C. The messengers’ hope and happiness are in the heavens; they have intimate fellowship with Christ; they also have the power and authority of the Lord, because they are in the right hand of the Lord Jesus—cf. Psa. 16:1-3; 73:25-26.
 - D. If we are willing to submit ourselves totally to the Lord’s hand, care for the things of Christ Jesus, and gladly bear the responsibility for His sake, not only will we receive the Lord’s reward, but the Lord will also use us to accomplish His great work—1 Cor. 15:58; 16:10; cf. Gen. 15:1; Phil. 2:19-21.
- IX. Out of Christ’s mouth proceeds a sharp two-edged sword, which is His discerning, judging, and slaying word for dealing with negative persons and things—Rev. 1:16b; Heb. 4:12; Eph. 6:17.**
- X. Christ’s face is as the sun shining in its power (Dan. 10:6) for judging enlightenment to bring in the kingdom—Rev. 1:16c; Matt. 17:2; cf. Mal. 4:2; Judg. 5:31; Matt. 13:43.**

XI. Christ is the First and the Last, assuring us that He will never leave His work unfinished, and the living One for the churches as the expression of His Body to be living, fresh, and strong—Rev. 1:17-18a:

- A. By knowing the Lord as the God who lives forever and ever, we can be assured of His presence in our spirit all the time; nothing establishes us more than the assured presence of the Lord—2 Tim. 4:22; cf. Gen. 39:23.
- B. The words *I am living forever and ever* should be our strength and hope (Rev. 1:18a); the living God whom Abraham called upon, whom Daniel served, whom Müller trusted, and whom Watchman Nee and Witness Lee knew is the God to whom we also belong and whom we also serve; we should worship Him and praise His name with joy!

XII. Christ has the keys of death and of Hades—Rev. 1:18b:

- A. Death is a collector and Hades is a keeper, but Christ nullified death on the cross and overcame Hades in His resurrection—2 Tim. 1:10; Acts 2:24.
- B. As long as we give the Lord the ground, the opportunity, and the way to move and act among us by exercising to deny the self, take up the cross, and lose our soul-life, death and Hades will be under His control—Matt. 16:18, 21-26.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

LEARNING HOW TO NOURISH PEOPLE

The members of the vital groups have to learn how to nourish people to continue their cherishing of people. Cherishing without nourishing is in vain. When a mother wants to feed a naughty child, she will first make him happy by cherishing him. But without nourishing him, her cherishing is meaningless. After cherishing the child, the mother nourishes him with food. This is the way that Christ as the Head takes care of His Body, the church. He nourishes us after cherishing us.

Revelation 1 shows us how Christ cares for the churches. Revelation is a book of signs. A sign is a symbol with spiritual significance. The first sign in Revelation shows us Christ in His humanity as the High Priest, and the last sign is the New Jerusalem. As the Son of Man, Christ as the High Priest is taking care of all the churches as lampstands (1:12-13). On the one hand, He is cherishing the churches in His humanity; on the other hand, He is nourishing the churches in His divinity. The members of the vital groups have to learn these two things. When we visit people, invite them to our home, or contact them before and after the meetings, we must be one with Christ to cherish and nourish them.

THE MEANING OF CHERISHING AND NOURISHING PEOPLE

To cherish people is to make them happy and to make them feel pleasant and comfortable. We must have a pleasant countenance when we contact people. We should be happy and rejoicing. We should not contact anyone with a cheerless countenance. We must give people the impression that we are genuinely happy and pleasant. Otherwise, we will not be able to cherish them, to make them happy.

Then we should go on to nourish them. We do not nourish people when we speak to them about marriage, courtship, politics, the world situation, or education. To nourish people is to feed them with the all-inclusive Christ in His full ministry in three stages. When we speak to people about Christ, we should not speak to them in an incomprehensible way in a kind of language which they do not understand. We have to find a way to present the all-inclusive

Christ to everyone. If a person wants people to eat beef, he must find a way to cook it to make them desire to eat it. Similarly, we have to “cook” the all-inclusive Christ. There are many different ways to cook the same thing. I have been cooking Christ in this country for over thirty-three years with about three thousand messages.

In order to nourish people with Christ, we first have to seek Christ, experience Christ, gain Christ, enjoy Christ, and participate in Christ. In Philippians, especially in chapters two and three, Paul used different expressions and utterances to portray how he was seeking and pursuing Christ in order to gain Christ. He told us that we should do all things without murmurings and reasonings. The sisters who are seeking Christ should learn not to murmur, and the brothers should learn not to reason. If you murmur and reason, you will offend the indwelling Christ, who is the embodiment of the Triune God, because this God is working in you that you may work out your salvation (2:12-14). Our salvation is our gaining and experiencing Christ. To gain Christ is to work out our own daily organic salvation.

BY THE DIVINE AND MYSTICAL LIFE IN RESURRECTION

Both cherishing people and nourishing people should be by the divine and mystical life in resurrection, not by the natural life in the old creation. When something divine is operating in a human being, this human being becomes very mystical. When I was a young man, I worked for more than seven and a half years in a big corporation. Suddenly, I resigned from my job so that I could preach Christ with all of my time. They asked me how I could make a living. My answer was that the Lord Jesus would provide for me. I became mystical to my classmates and friends and also to my relatives. They could not understand why I would give up my job to serve the Lord with all of my time. I was a mystery to them.

We should cherish people by the divine and mystical life in resurrection. *In resurrection* means that there is nothing natural in our care for people. Anything that is of our natural life should not be used. Our life must be in resurrection. In other words, our natural life must be crucified and resurrected to become a human life in resurrection. The young people have to learn how to labor in the gospel on the college campuses, not by their natural life but by God within them as their life. This is the divine life, and this divine life makes us a mystery. Someone whom you contact may ask you where you have graduated from and what kind of degree you have. You may say that you have a degree from Harvard in biochemistry. They may ask, “What are you doing here?” When you say that you are learning to preach Christ, they will not be able to understand what kind of person you are. They would consider, “This person has graduated from a top university with an excellent degree. The whole world needs him. He could get an excellent job. Why would he come here to preach Christ?” This makes you a mystical person. You have been educated highly, but you are now doing a job which seemingly is not that high but very mystical. You have become a divine, mystical person in resurrection.

We must realize that the sevenfold intensified life-giving Spirit only honors things in resurrection. If you do any work which is not in resurrection, the life-giving Spirit will never honor it. Thus, your labor will be in vain, with no result. Most of the work in today’s Christianity is not in resurrection. Most Christians work in their natural life, not by the divine and mystical life in resurrection. Anything that is natural belongs to the old creation. Our contact with people should not be in the old creation but in resurrection. It is only in this way that we can cherish and nourish people with Christ, the all-inclusive One.

THE MODEL OF CHRIST CHERISHING THE CHURCHES AND NOURISHING THE CHURCHES IN TAKING CARE OF THE CHURCHES

Christ is the best model of cherishing and nourishing as seen in Revelation 1. In verses 12

and 13 John said, “I turned to see the voice that spoke with me; and when I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment reaching to the feet, and girded about at the breasts with a golden girdle.” This shows that Christ is taking care of the lampstands by being the Son of Man with a long garment. This garment is the priestly robe (Exo. 28:33-35), which shows that Christ is our great High Priest.

He is also girded about at the breasts with a golden girdle. This girdle is a long piece of gold. The girdle and the gold are not two separate things. The girdle is the gold. The golden girdle is one piece of gold to become a belt. The Son of Man is in His humanity, and the golden girdle signifies His divinity. This golden girdle is on His breasts, and the breasts are a sign of love.

The priests in the Old Testament were girded at the loins for their ministry (Exo. 28:4). In Daniel 10:5 Christ also is girded at His loins, with fine gold. To be girded at the loins is to be strengthened for the work. Christ has finished His divine work in producing the churches. Now by His love He is caring for the churches which He has produced. This is why He is girded at the breasts. Today Christ is our High Priest taking care of His churches established by His labor. But now He takes care of the churches with the girdle not on His loins but on His breasts, signifying love. I hope we all could realize that in these days even among us, Christ is wearing a golden girdle on His breasts.

The golden girdle is a sign, signifying Christ’s divinity becoming His energy. Christ’s energy is totally His divinity. A piece of gold is now a girdle. The totality of Christ in His divinity has become a girdle. The golden girdle signifies Christ’s divinity becoming His energy, and the breasts signify that this golden energy is exercised and motivated by His love. His divine energy is exercised by and with His love to nourish the churches.

Taking Care of the Churches in His Humanity

Christ takes care of the churches as the lampstands in His humanity as “the Son of Man” to cherish them (Rev. 1:13a). Christ as our High Priest takes care of the churches He has established first in His humanity to cherish the churches, to make the churches happy, pleasant, and comfortable.

By Dressing the Lamps

He does this by dressing the lamps of the lampstand. The high priest in the Old Testament dressed the lamps of the lampstands every morning (Exo. 30:7). To dress the lamps is to make them proper.

By Trimming the Wicks

Christ cares for the lampstands by trimming the wicks of the lamps of the lampstand, just as the priest did according to the type in the Old Testament (Exo. 25:38). When the wick was burned out, it became charred and black, so the priest had to come to cut off the black part of the wick. This is what it means to snuff the wick so that the lamp may shine better. The charred part of the wick, the snuff, signifies things that are not according to God’s purpose which need to be cut off, such as our flesh, our natural man, our self, and our old creation. All the lampstands are organic. They are living lampstands. Since each church is a living lampstand, each church has much feeling. A church with charred wicks will not feel comfortable.

About eight years ago, there was no feeling of happiness or pleasantness with the church in Anaheim. This was because of the black, burned out, charred wicks. But one day

Christ as our High Priest came to dress the lamps of the lampstand, the church in Anaheim, by trimming the wicks to cut off all the black, charred wicks. This was a cherishing, to make the church in Anaheim happy, pleasant, and comfortable. There is no comparison between the way the church in Anaheim was eight years ago and the way it is today. Eight years ago it was full of burned, black wicks, with no shining. The saints felt unhappy, unpleasant, and uncomfortable. But one day the Lord Jesus as the High Priest in His humanity came to snuff all the negative things. Then we became happy, pleasant, and comfortable. This is Christ's taking care of the church in His humanity to dress the lamps of the church.

I thank the Lord that today in His recovery He is the High Priest in His humanity. Hebrews 4 says that we do not have a High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all respects like us, yet without sin (v. 15). Our Christ is the same as we are. He has been tempted in everything like us, so He can easily be touched with the feeling of our weaknesses. This means that He always sympathizes with our weaknesses in His humanity. He is the High Priest in His humanity taking care of us by cherishing us all the time.

Taking Care of the Churches in His Divinity

Christ, as the High Priest, takes care of the churches as the lampstands in His divinity with His divine love, signified by the golden girdle on His breasts, to nourish the churches (Rev. 1:13b). Christ is not only human but also divine. He is the Son of Man wearing a golden girdle, signifying His divinity as His divine energy. His divinity as the divine energy nourishes the churches in many ways.

Revelation 2 and 3 reveal Christ's care for the lampstands. On the one hand, He trims the wicks of the church lamps, cutting away all the wrongdoings, shortages, failures, and defects mentioned in the seven epistles to the seven churches. Christ did the best trimming work in His humanity to cherish the churches. On the other hand, in each of these seven epistles, we see Christ's nourishing.

In the first epistle to the church at Ephesus, Christ says, "To him who overcomes, to him I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God" (2:7). We may say that this is a prophecy referring to the kingdom age, in which the overcomers will enjoy Christ as the tree of life in God's Paradise. But if we do not enjoy Christ as the tree of life in the church life today, surely we will not participate in the tree of life in the kingdom age. According to my experience, today the church in Anaheim is a paradise to me. In this paradise I eat much of Christ as the tree of life every day. If I do not eat Christ here today, I will not eat Him in the kingdom age. I have to eat here first.

In the second epistle to Smyrna, a persecuted and suffering church, Christ said that He would give the crown of life to those who overcome (v. 10). A crown signifies victory. If we are not a victor today, overcoming persecution and suffering, how can we be victors in the kingdom? Our victory today is out of Christ's being our life. If we do not have such an enjoyment today, how can we wear the crown of life in the coming age?

The third epistle was to the church in Pergamos. Pergamos was a church married to the world. The Lord will give the overcomers in Pergamos to eat of the hidden manna (v. 17). In the Old Testament, a portion of manna was preserved in a golden pot concealed in the Ark (Exo. 16:32-34; Heb. 9:4). Today we must enjoy the hidden Christ in God's golden divine nature. Then we will enjoy Christ as the hidden manna in the coming age. Also, the Lord will give us a white stone and a new name, signifying that we have become a transformed person to be material for God's building.

The Lord promised the overcomers in the church in Thyatira that they would have the authority to rule, to reign as kings, over the nations (Rev. 2:26). First, we need to reign as kings today. According to Romans 5:17 we must receive the Lord's abounding grace to reign in life today. If we do not reign as kings today in Christ's life, how can we be kings in the coming age to rule over the nations?

In His fifth epistle, the Lord told the church in Sardis that they were dead and dying. He promised the overcomers that they would be clothed in white garments (Rev. 3:5). White garments signify the walk and living that are not stained with deadness. The way the overcomers walk in this age will be a prize to them in the coming age. We have to become living so that we can have the white garments.

The Lord told the church in Philadelphia to hold fast to what they already had (v. 11). Those who overcome to hold fast what they have in the Lord's recovery will be built into the New Jerusalem, the temple of God, as a pillar (v. 12). In the seventh epistle, the Lord counseled the church in Laodicea to buy gold, white garments, and eyesalve to be saved from their degradation in lukewarmness (v. 18). He promised to dine with the ones who would open the door to Him (v. 20). We can see that this is the nourishing of Christ in His divinity exercised by and with His love.

***With His Divine and Mystical Ministry
by Love in His Three Stages***

He is also the High Priest with His divinity as the "energy belt" to nourish us with Himself as the all-inclusive Christ in His full ministry of three stages.

That the Churches May Grow and Mature in His Divine Life

His nourishing the churches in His divinity is so that the churches may grow and mature in His divine life and become the overcomers in His sevenfold intensification.

Our Christ today is our High Priest. In His humanity He is easily touched with the feeling of our weaknesses. He sympathizes with our weakness because He was tempted in all respects like us. He is cherishing us in His humanity. Meanwhile, He is nourishing us in His divinity with all the positive aspects of His person revealed in the seven epistles to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. He is taking care of the churches in the recovery in both ways. In His humanity He is cherishing us to make us proper so that we may be happy, pleasant, and comfortable. In His divinity He is nourishing us so that we may grow and mature in the divine life to be His overcomers to accomplish His eternal economy. (*The Vital Groups*, pp. 102-109)