

WHY IS THERE CONFLICT?

Matthew 16:18—And I also, I say unto thee that thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my [church], and hades' gates shall not prevail against it.

Our gathering for this time is around the theme: Prepare the way of the Lord. And this, of course, means preparing the way of the second coming of the Lord. Before our Lord Jesus came into this world the first time, God had prepared the way for His coming—not only the time for it but He had prepared the vessels for it.

We know from Galatians 4:4 that in the fullness of time, God sent His Son into this world. Therefore, we can see that there is a timing involved, and it was the time when Rome controlled the entire known world. There was peace throughout the land, and there were also good roads everywhere because the Romans were famous for their building of roads. At the same time, the Greek language was being used in commerce. So it seems as if the time was ripe for the coming of the Lord. We also find that the Lord had prepared vessels—Zacharias and Elizabeth and through them came John the Baptist. He prepared Joseph and Mary, and Simeon and Anna. These are the ones we know about, and we believe there must have been many others. Thus, it is very clear that at the first coming of the Lord Jesus, there was a preparation both in time and in vessels.

As we are sharing about preparing the way of the Lord, of course, we know this refers to His imminent second coming; therefore, our emphasis is a little different. It is more on the *way* of the preparation for the coming of the Lord. Therefore, we are using especially Matthew 16:18. After Simon Peter received revelation from God the Father concerning the Lord Jesus and confessed Him as such: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,” then the Lord revealed something more of God’s eternal purpose. He said, “You are Peter, a small stone, but I will build My

church upon this massive Rock, out of which all of these small, living stones will come from. I will build My church upon Me Myself and the confession of Peter.” Then He said: “And the gates of hades shall not prevail against it.”

There are three things emphasized here. One is the vision of Christ, which is the only basic way of preparing for His coming. The second one is the vessel, and the way He prepares the vessel for His coming. The third one is the conflict which is the way that the vessel is prepared, and the coming of the Lord is speeded up.

IN THE BEGINNING THERE WAS NO CONFLICT

Here, we will consider the way of conflict as the preparation for the coming of the Lord. Therefore, I would like to go back to the beginning and see why there is conflict upon this earth.

We know that when God created the heavens and the earth, there was no conflict whatsoever because everything God had created was perfect. It speaks of this in Psalm 19:1: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork.” Everything glorified the Lord, both in heaven and on earth; there was no conflict at all. When God laid the foundation of the earth, the morning stars sang and shouted for joy because they agreed with what God had done (see Job 38:7). It was wonderful and perfect!

Even when we go back to Revelation 4, which we believe is a review of the creation of God the Creator, everything was so harmonious. You find there were twenty-four elders sitting on their thrones, casting their crowns down before the One who was upon His throne, and worshipping Him. The four living creatures were crying day and night: “Holy, Holy, Holy, God Almighty.” There was worship to the God who had created everything according to His will and for His glory.

That is why we find in the word of God, at the very beginning of God's creation, everything was harmonious, good, and expressed the glory of God. There was no discord and no conflict.

THE TWO PARABLES THAT REVEAL THE BEGINNING OF THE CONFLICT

So why is there conflict afterwards? Now, of course, we do not see in plain words in the word of God how it happened; but thank God, He has given us some hints. In the Bible God used two different parables, and as we read them, we cannot apply these two kings to any human beings. It has to be something higher. He uses the king of Tyre and the king of Babylon, and in these two instances, as we read the description, if we are without prejudice, we have to confess that this is something deeper than can be applied to any human beings.

The King of Tyre a Type of Lucifer

For instance, in Ezekiel 28:11-15 we read these words: "And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyre, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Thou, who sealest up the measure of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty, thou wast in Eden, the garden of God. Every precious stone was thy covering: the sardius, the topaz, and the diamond, the chrysolite, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the carbuncle, and the emerald, and gold. The workmanship of thy tambours and of thy pipes was in thee: in the day that thou wast created were they prepared. Thou wast the anointed covering cherub, and I had set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou didst walk up and down in the midst of stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways, from the day that thou wast created, till unrighteousness was found in thee."

We cannot apply this description to any human being because it is beyond any man. In a sense, God is using the king of Tyre as a type of something bigger and greater. We believe that it refers to the archangel Lucifer. Most likely, God created the angels even before the foundation of the earth was laid. When He created them, there was one angel among the angels who seemed to be above the others. We do not know whether he was the first one created, but he was created in such perfection. He was given wonderful musical talents and adorned with ten different precious metals. He was the anointed angel who was over the throne of God—just as we find later on when Moses made the ark and two cherubs covered the mercy seat. This angel must have been the closest of the angels to God because he had the liberty to walk up and down before Him. Just as we read in Ezekiel 28:15: “Thou wast perfect in thy ways, from the day that thou wast created.”

We cannot help but wonder if he was the one who led all of the angels in worshipping God because he was given great authority and dominion. When he was created, he was perfect; there was absolutely nothing wrong with him. But sadly, we read at the end of verse 15 that he was perfect from the day he was created until unrighteousness was found in him. Somehow, something happened to this archangel.

“By the abundance of thy traffic they filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned” (Ezekiel 28:16).

In the beginning he was faithful and was given so much by God. But as he continued to rule for God, something happened. Unrighteousness, violence, and sin began to appear in him. Now this happened during the first world, and we do not know how long it was before this archangel began to rebel against God.

In Ezekiel 28:16-19 we read: “By the abundance of thy traffic they filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned; therefore have I cast thee as profane from the

mountain of God, and have destroyed thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Thy heart was lifted up because of thy beauty; thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I have cast thee to the ground, I have laid thee before kings, that they may behold thee. By the multitude of thine iniquities, by the unrighteousness of thy traffic, thou hast profaned thy sanctuaries: and I have brought forth a fire out of the midst of thee—it hath consumed thee; and I have brought thee to ashes upon the earth, in the sight of all them that behold thee. All they that know thee among the peoples shall be amazed at thee: thou art become a terror, and thou shalt never be any more.”

We can see from this that even in the early days there was a rebellion. The archangel Lucifer became proud of himself—proud of his wisdom and of his power.

The King of Babylon a Type of Lucifer

When we turn to Isaiah 14:12, we find what really was in his heart. However, when we read the verses before that, it is speaking of the king of Babylon. Then suddenly there comes a description that does not fit with any human being, even the king of Babylon.

“How art thou fallen from heaven, Lucifer, son of the morning! (Isaiah 14:12a)

This plainly speaks of Lucifer, the morning star, who has fallen.

Isaiah 14:12b: “Thou art cut down to the ground, that didst prostrate the nations!”

Why did this happen?

Isaiah 14:13a: “And thou that didst say in thy heart.”

Something began to come into his heart.

He said, “I will ascend into the heavens, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit upon the mount of assembly, in the recesses of the north; I will ascend

above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High” (Isaiah 14:13b-14).

Here we find the reason for the rebellion. We see how the “I” comes out from within him. He wanted to ascend to the heavens. He wanted to exalt his throne above the stars of God. He even wanted to sit in the council of God. He wanted to rise up as high as the most High and be like Him.

When we read Philippians 2 in the New Testament, it describes the mind of Christ, but it also mentions another mind. This other mind is the one who tried to rob the place of the Son of God, and we know this is the mind of the devil, the adversary of God.

This is the origin of the conflict of the ages. It is really a conflict between God and His enemy Satan. Now how did God react to this situation? It would have been very easy for God to simply destroy this archangel, and then everything would be peaceful again. But this is not God's way. God's way is always higher than man's way; He has His own strategy. God's strategy at that time was not to destroy His enemy Himself because if He did that, He would not get glory out of it. It would be like a grown-up man beating a little child. Where is the glory in that? God would not do that even though He is quite able to do so. He is using One who is lower than the angels and those who come out from Him. This is the way that He will destroy His enemy, and this will give Him glory. This is the strategy that God has decided on to meet and defeat His adversary.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE EARTH WHEN LUCIFER FELL

Evidently, in the first creation the planet earth was under the rule and government of Lucifer, and when he was dismissed from heaven and fell from before the throne of God, there was destruction in the area where he had dominion. And we believe that the planet earth was in that area of destruction. This is where Genesis begins as we

read chapter 1:1: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”

We believe that this is the real beginning of the heavens and the earth. We do not know how long God created in the beginning, but we do know that when God does something, He will not leave anything undone. He always does it perfectly. So we can believe that when God created, it was done perfectly. That is why we believe this verse refers to the very beginning of the heavens and the earth.

However, it is then strange to read Genesis 1:2: “And the earth was waste and empty, and darkness was on the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”

God will never create a waste nor something void and without meaning. That is not like our God. Whatever He creates is perfect and full of meaning. But strangely this is what we find: “And the earth was waste and empty.” Maybe we would say: “*But* the earth was waste and empty.” How did it happen? Evidently, there must have been a catastrophe that came upon the earth because water began to surround the earth, and darkness penetrated and filled it. The earth became a waste; everything was in disorder. And not only was it void, but it was also empty; it had lost its purpose.

We do not know how long this existed, but we do know one thing: this must be what is called the Ice Age in geology. During this period, when the earth was surrounded with water, darkness, and ice, all of the fossils that have been found are from that time period. It must be that the first earth and all those which inhabited the earth were destroyed. However, we do not know how long this Ice Age period lasted. But thank God, verse 2 says that the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters. In other words, God began to restore the ruined earth into a habitable place. The Spirit of God hovered over it like a

mother hen hovering over its eggs. God's warmth and His creative power began to move over the face of the water.

THE RESTORED EARTH IN GENESIS 1

Out of the energy of the Holy Spirit, the earth was restored in part. In Genesis 1:3-31 we find the six days of creation. So far as we understand, the six days of creation were not the original created work. Actually, it must have been the restored earth in which the Lord used six days to make it habitable. Why did He do that? God was going to create man.

So we are the latecomers. We did not exist in the first world. We were created in the beginning of the second world, even on the last day which was the sixth day. Thank God, when He created man, it was in a very different way, a way that He had never done before. We know that when He created angels, it was not in His image or according to His likeness. He created them out of His wisdom, power, and character; that is true. They were not created in His own inner nature and character or in His outward form. Man is the only creation that is created in the image of God and after the form of God.

MAN CREATED IN THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD

Now we know the word *image* is not what we use today. When we talk about image, we think about something that can be seen. But the image here refers to the inner nature and quality of God. When God created man, it was according to His own character and nature and after His likeness. And the likeness here refers to outside form; but of course, we know God has no form. He is the invisible God. Nevertheless, among the Godhead, there is One who has a form, and that is the second Person of the Trinity. Our outward form is made after the second Person of the Trinity. Man is created in such a wonderful and glorious way.

MAN WAS CREATED TO SUBDUE THE EARTH AND BRING IT BACK TO GOD

Why did God do that? We know that He never does anything without purpose. He does everything according to His purpose, His eternal will, His good pleasure, and something that He has in His heart. Why did He create man in such a special way? He did it because He wants to use man as His vessel and instrument to defeat His enemy. We are created with a purpose. We are not created for ourselves or for our pleasure but to fulfill God's wonderful purpose and marvelous strategy. We are created to be used by God to destroy God's enemy which will bring glory to Him. That is why man was created in the first place and why, after God created man, He gave him dominion over the fowls of the air, the beasts of the field, and the fishes of the sea. He committed the earth to man to subdue it because it is under the control of God's enemy. Hence, He raised up man to subdue it and bring it back to the feet of God.

We need to keep in mind that we are something special in the strategy of God. How sad it is, today, that we think so highly of ourselves; but no matter how great we think we are, we think too little of ourselves, because according to the will of God, we were created with such a nature, such a possibility, such a commitment, and with such a work to do. How sad it is that we have failed!

ADAM AND EVE FAILED IN THEIR COMMISSION FROM GOD

In the beginning of man's history, God created Adam and Eve, who were a corporate being; because one single person can never contain the fullness of God or defeat God's enemy. He created the corporate person—man and woman—and He asked them to keep and guard the garden because the enemy was outside. We do not know how long Adam and Eve were in the garden of Eden enjoying God's

provisions and the fellowship of God. Probably it was not a very long time. Then we read in the Scriptures that something happened to them—the enemy came into the garden.

We see two things here: the first is that Adam and Eve were supposed to guard the garden. They were, as it were, the wall for the garden of Eden. God commissioned them for this work, but evidently, they were not faithful to it.

The second thing is that man and woman are supposed to be together because they are one; but strangely, we see that Eve seemed to have drifted away from Adam. They were apart, and when we are apart, weakness will be revealed.

ADAM AND EVE WERE GIVEN A CHOICE OF WHO TO OBEY

The enemy used this failure of man to slip into the garden and tempt Eve. Evidently, Eve was before the tree of the knowledge of good and evil when he came to her. Now God had planted the tree of life in the midst of the garden, and beside the tree of life was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. I often say that whatever God planted in the garden of Eden was good, because He will never create a bad tree in the garden of pleasure. All of the fruit-bearing trees in the garden were food to nourish the body of man. Actually the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was food for the soul of man—the mind was to make them wise and enable them to know what is good and what is evil. In the midst of the garden was the tree of life which was food for our spirit. By eating the tree of life, man would have the life of God which would strengthen their spirit and make them one with God. God purposely planted those two trees in the midst of the garden, and everything was good.

Why did He do so? We have mentioned that God created man according to His own image, and He is *the*

perfect will in the universe. Therefore, when He created man, He gave them a will. But what is the will if there is no choice? God provided those two trees before man to give them an opportunity to choose God's way by eating the fruit of the tree of life and receiving life from Him, uniting with Him and living a dependent life, fulfilling all of God's purpose. Or would they prefer to make themselves gods and know good and evil? This way they would not need to ask God what is good and bad, much like children who have to ask parents because they have no knowledge of it. They would be independent, grown-up in themselves, living by themselves, and for themselves. They were free to choose this selfish way. These were the two ways God placed before man in order to allow them to choose.

Unfortunately, man preferred the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They wanted to be independent of God and depend on themselves. They considered themselves able to do this. But God knew very well that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which is a *good* tree, is the enemy of the best. It has proven to be the downfall of man.

Let us not blame Eve or Adam. Even today, if these two trees were put before us, what tree would we choose? Is it not true that even today man chooses to be independent of God? We can do it. We do not need to depend on God. We are our own king, our sovereign. This is the spirit of the adversary of God. Unfortunately, we have inherited this spirit. In other words, all who are born of Adam have inherited his fallen nature. We all have this independent spirit within us and do not want God. This is the sad history of mankind.

GOD SENDS HIS SON AS MAN

Thank God, He does not give up. He still sticks to His own strategy which He believes to be the best. One day, in the fullness of time, when everything seemed to be at the right time, God sent His Son into this world to be born of

woman, to be born under law, that He might deliver us out of the law and bring us into sonship. This is how redemption came to us.

Thus, we are here as the redeemed of the Lord. God never gave man up. He still wants to use man to defeat His enemy; therefore He sent His Son into this world to be a Man. We read in Philippians 2 how, He who is equal with God, one with God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped. That gives us a hint that once before someone had tried to grasp that position, which was Lucifer, the fallen angel. This is the right position of the Son—equal with God because He is God. He is in the image and form of God. Thank God, in His wisdom and arrangement, the Father and the Son are one. The Father sent His Son into this world, and the Son was willing to be sent.

When we think of incarnation, we cannot fathom what it really involved. When we consider that God the Son, who is equal with God, was sitting on the throne being worshipped by all the obedient angels with honor and glory, and then He emptied Himself and came down to earth as Man. This emptying is something beyond our human understanding. We have nothing to empty but our sins; therefore, it is far beyond our comprehension. He had everything—and He emptied all of the honor and glory, and the position that accompanied His Godhead. Of course, He could not empty Himself of His Godhead because that is what He is. Even when He was on earth, He was God because that is what He is. But everything that accompanies God, He emptied Himself and came to be a Man. He was even born in a manger, the lowest place for man.

THE ENEMY'S ATTEMPT TO TAKE JESUS FROM THE GROUND OF MAN

From the beginning of His earthly time on earth, the enemy tried to destroy Him because he knew that this

would be the Man who would be his end. He used King Herod to kill all of the boys under two years old in the Bethlehem area, but God had already sent His Son down to Egypt. When He came back, He lived in a small place called Nazareth where He learned to be a carpenter. We do not know much of His hidden years, but one thing we do know: He lived His hidden years as a perfect Man. He obeyed His parents; He learned the trade and became *the* carpenter, famous for His carpentry work; He supported the family because the father must have died early; He was hidden for thirty years.

When He stepped out from His home in Nazareth, He came out as a Man. He came to be baptized by John the Baptist, who sensed something noble in Him. He said, “I cannot baptize You; You should baptize me.” But Jesus said: “Let us do it for righteousness sake. This is the way God has ordained for this time.” It was the way of repentance in order to go back to God’s purpose. Our Lord Jesus was baptized as a representative Man. Even though He had nothing to repent of, He took all our sins, as it were, and repented before God. It is no wonder that when He came out of the water, the heavens opened and said, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased.”

Immediately afterwards, He was led by the Spirit of God into the wilderness to be tempted by the enemy. He was alone in the wilderness for forty days and nights without eating or drinking—unlike Adam and Eve who were tempted in the best environment in the garden of Eden. When our Lord Jesus was tempted, He was in the desert or the wilderness, alone by Himself.

What was His temptation? The devil came to tempt Him and said, “Now, if You are the Son of God, You can easily turn these stones into bread and fill your stomach which is hungry.” In other words, the enemy tempted Him to act as God and not as man. If He should act as God, He could not represent man anymore because only man can die for man.

Only a perfect Man can die for sinful man. Our Lord Jesus overcame all these temptations and remained as Man, submitting Himself to God, His Father. He overcame the enemy who left Him for a time.

During His three open public years, the enemy tried every means to tempt Him and remove Him from the position of Man to be God; but he could not do that. Jesus was obedient to His Father, even unto death, and that the death of the cross. So we can see that the second Man came to the fight on this earth.

THE ENEMY IS DEFEATED

On Calvary's cross, He drew the enemy out from this world. He crushed the head of the enemy and took captive all the principalities and authorities which were under the enemy, and made a show of them through His victory. In other words, His victory was decisive. Our Lord Jesus as *the* Man, the representative Man, has overcome the enemy completely and perfectly. He said, "It is finished." And that is the finished, complete work of Christ.

Today, we are in the good of that victory. Strictly speaking, the conflict is not between you and the enemy; the conflict is between God and the enemy. Nevertheless, because we are the vessel and the instrument used by God to finish the enemy, therefore we are involved in the conflict. For us it is the fight of faith because we cannot fight it by ourselves; we can only fight it by believing in the finished work of Christ.

IN THE WORLD WE HAVE TRIBULATIONS

Hence, this is why we have conflict today. Formerly, we were the allies of God's enemy but now we are his enemy. No wonder our Lord Jesus said: "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be not afraid, because I have overcome the world." Our Lord Jesus said, "I have sent you out as sheep among the wolves. You will have tribulations and

sufferings, but you do not need to be afraid, because I have overcome.” So I hope this will show us why there is conflict in our lives. This is why the gates of hades are all open to attack the church that God is building. May the Lord strengthen our faith.

Let's pray:

Dear Lord, as we come into this marvelous work that Thou art doing today, we praise and thank Thee because our Lord Jesus Christ has already overcome, and we are in the train of His victory. Oh, dear Lord, do deliver us from any fear knowing that Thou hast overcome. We praise and thank Thee that by faith, we may fight the good fight. We may be able to accomplish and finish up the work Thou hast left for us to do. So Lord, may this be reality in each and every one of us. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.