

The Expression of the Heavenly Vision in the Church

Let's commit the time with a word of prayer:

Lord, indeed this is our prayer that even as we meditate on Your Word, oh Lord, that it would create more love to Thee. We pray, Lord, that this time would be a time that You set apart for Yourself, and Your Holy Spirit in all His freedom and power reveals the Lord Jesus in a further way to each one of us, capturing our hearts. We do pray for Your own glory, Lord, enabling prayer, oh glory. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

I want to read a passage that is very well known from Matthew 16. It is the so-called confession of Peter in Caesarea Philippi.

Matthew 16:15-25: "He (our Lord Jesus) said to them, (the disciples) 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered: 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ. From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.' But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's. Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.'"

Revelation 3:14-22: "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, and I have become wealthy, and have need of nothing, and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and will dine with him, and he with Me. He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"

I John 1:1a: "That which was from the beginning."

Chapter 2:18: "Little children, now is the last hour."

The Great Day of the Lord

As we considered together in my previous session, the day of Pentecost represents a mighty beginning of the Lord. It represents the beginning of the last days, as we read in the prophecy of Joel that was quoted in that day. And by that, as Peter explained, he was essentially saying that a new age, a new dispensation, a new time of God was starting right then in that day. As we see in that wonderful discourse or message, on the basis of the finished work of the Lord Jesus, the day of the Holy Spirit had begun. The Holy Spirit had been poured, and that would be the characteristic of the whole age. And if you remember, we mentioned that quickly, but I want to emphasize that. It is very striking to me that in the prophecy of Joel it starts mentioning that the Lord says, "I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh." Then the quotation says, "Until the great day of the Lord." That is the scope of the age that began that day. It began in the day of Pentecost, and it extends all the way to the second coming of the Lord Jesus. That is how the day of the great day of the Lord is used quite consistently in the Old Testament, including the book of Joel. So we are in this day, brothers and sisters, living in that age, in that day of the Holy Spirit that began in the day of Pentecost. Again, this is the essence of the explanation of the Apostle Peter on the basis of the Person and finished work of Christ, the Holy Spirit was being given; it was being poured out.

As you remember, when He was approaching the end of that explanation He tells us how the Lord Jesus Himself was the One that received that promise of the Holy Spirit which may seem a little bit nonintuitive. Who is receiving that? We tend to think that the disciples were receiving that, which is true, of course, but it is what Peter was explaining. Because Jesus was exalted, He received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, and essentially there seems to be here an echo of Psalm 133, the oil was being poured down on the head of Aaron and coming down to his beard, all the way to the edge of his garments. This is what was happening on that day of Pentecost. The Head and body was being joined together under that anointing. When the Holy Spirit was being given, that is, being produced, a new corporate man was being formed.

The Head and Body Were Joined Together

We probably should read a verse from I Corinthians chapter 12, a very well-known verse, but it explains what was happening in that day.

I Corinthians 12:12: the Apostle Paul says, "For even as the body is one, and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ."

He never read this before, which I am sure that most of you have. But if you have never read this before it sounds very kind of puzzling. It sounds as if he should be saying, "Well, you know just as the members of the body, though they are many are one body so also is the church. But no, he says, "So also is Christ." In the original, it was "the Christ." Why? What does Paul have in mind? Oh, he is talking about this new corporate man that was born in the day of Pentecost, that

came into existence. Christ, the Head, the church His body, joined by that work of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

And because of that, brothers and sisters, as we mentioned in the previous, (we are still recapping here) the day of Pentecost marks the beginning of the expression of the heavenly vision in the church. Peter, right there, is having that revelation. He was interpreting what is happening in that moment by the revelation of the Holy Spirit using Scripture after Scripture. He saw exactly what was happening, and he was announcing that. That is the heavenly vision. It is because of Christ, because of His finished work, the Holy Spirit was given. It did not mention the birth of the church; there was no need. People could see that togetherness, standing together, and because of that, the new day began, and the rivers of living water began to flow from that day on. That is the story of the book of Acts. Starting from chapter 2, you have those rivers flowing, beginning in Jerusalem, then in Judea, Samaria, all the way to the ends of the earth. You know that Rome was probably considered for the Jews, not for the Romans, the end of the earth. And if you look at it from that angle, it is very telling that the book of Acts ended with Paul in Rome.

What the Lord said in that planning, chapter 1:8 has been fulfilled to the letter, starting from Jerusalem, then through all Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth. It was those rivers of living water, the expression of that heavenly vision that began on that day of Pentecost.

Now, I heard that there was some questions during the fellowship times which I love to hear. I am not participating in them, but I heard through a spy, my wife, in her group that there was a question that I think is wonderful. I love when I hear that. "So after all, what is the heavenly vision?" I realize how these things can sound very mystical and mysterious. Heavenly vision, heavenly vision, whole counsel of God! What is that heavenly vision that was being expressed that day? And you know, brothers and sisters, to me there is nothing more simple than that. Sometimes we use the words because they are in Scripture, and I am not saying that we should not use them, but perhaps we should make this very clear. What was being expressed in that heavenly vision and through the church? My various brothers, speaking in this time, have already pointed out that it is simply the Person of the Lord Jesus. He is essentially that focal point that is being expressed, the Person of Christ.

Jesus is Continuing to Do and to Teach through the Church

Now if you remember, the beginning of the book of Acts already points towards that. Let me read it for you.

Acts 1:1: Dr. Luke is writing saying, "The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach."

And as we know, I am repeating it to you, oh but how we need to be reminded of this. This is what the book of Acts is all about. If Luke is saying, "I wrote you the first account, which is his gospel, this book is the continuation, the second account, but a continuation of what? The first account is about all that Jesus began to do and teach. The logical conclusion is that the second account is going to be what Jesus is continuing to do and to teach. Of course, He is not here physically anymore since His ascension, and that is the whole point of the book of Acts, isn't it? Because in the first account in the gospel of Luke, you see what the Lord Jesus did through His

physical body. In the book of Acts, it is going to be a continuation. He is still the One doing it, so the whole title, “The Acts of the Apostles” with all due respect is not in the original. It is kind of a little bit misleading. Yes, they are the ones doing it, but at the end of the day, they are not the ones doing it. Who is doing it? Who is continuing to do it? The Lord Jesus, Himself. How? No longer through His physical body, which is now ascended, exalted, anointed at the right hand of the Father, but through that mystical body that was born on the day of Pentecost. Do you see the expression? Do you see what the book of Acts is all about? The Lord Jesus was continuing to express all that He did in His physical body, all that He taught to His body, the church—the expression of the heavenly vision.

Listen again. When Jesus did something, when He taught something, what was being expressed? Do you think that He was interested in just people getting a new code of ethics, for people to understand a higher morality or a new religion? Brothers and sisters, I think the book of John helps us greatly in that regard. What is His testimony? Did you notice how often in the book of John our Lord Jesus is saying, “I Am; I Am, I Am, I Am the bread of life. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the way, the truth and the life.” He was testifying of Himself. Do you see what is the heavenly vision? It is Christ Himself, and oh, that is the point. In Acts that is what is going to continue to be done. The heavenly vision is nothing more than Christ Himself being expressed in the church, and it began on that wondrous day of Pentecost. I will finish the recapping here, and my brothers are saying this in a much better way than me. But I think this bears repetition because it is so easy for us to get all these sayings and put them in a bottle or in a compartment in our brains. Then they become a kind of knowledge.

The Heavenly Vision Is Seen in the Eyes of Our Hearts

Now listen, mental knowledge is part of the process. Of course, there is no question about it, but if it stays at that level we miss the whole point. If all we have is an understanding of the teaching of the doctrine and what not, the whole point is missed. The heavenly vision is something that we see deeper than in our brains. It is something that is being seen in the eyes of our hearts, in our spirits as our brother said last night. And somehow when you see that with the eyes of your heart, how do you know that you saw it? It is something that will arrest you; it will capture you. So there is this famous phrase, and I forget the brother who said it: “Once caught, no escape.” Whoever it was, what a wonderful description of the effect of having that heavenly vision. If you see this Lord, who died for you, who rose for you, who is enthroned for you, not just for you individually, but He has joined you to Him in one body with the church. If we see that, what can ever compare with that? “Once caught, no escape.” That is the effect of this heavenly vision, and the substance of it. It describes Himself, this Person.

Peter’s Confession in Caesarea Phillippi

Okay, enough for recaps. I oftentimes go for recaps, and most of my message is gone with that, so I think I am doing a little better on that department, I hope.

We read the passage that is very well known, of what was happening in Caesarea Phillippi. Now this is often referred to as Peter’s confession, and I think that most of us, if you have been in the Lord for just a few years, will be quite familiar with it because it is such an important and

seminal passage. There is a revelation being imparted here, and it is a double revelation in a way. First, Peter receives a revelation from the Father concerning the Person of our Lord Jesus. So the Lord is the One that is initiating the whole thing, and this is really wonderful in itself because the Lord is asking the disciples. He is kind of causing that to come about.

“Who do you say that I am?” I am shorting it in the version; you know the whole story. First, He asked, “What are the people saying about Me?” Then Peter answers, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And to that, our Lord Jesus said, “Yes, blessed are you, Simon Barjona. It was not your brain.” You see the difference between vision and mental knowledge. “You are not seeing this out of your own conclusions, deductions, studies; you are seeing this because My Father is revealing it to you. This is vision; this is revelation. Peter saw who He is.

Upon This Rock I will Build My Church

Now this was given to Peter by the Father. I think you notice how our Lord Jesus expands that revelation, and He says, “I also say to you, that you are Peter, a stone, as we know, a little rock, and upon this rock, the Person of the Lord Jesus, I will build My church.” Now I want to consider this briefly. I do not know if you noticed this, but in a way, what is happening in Caesarea Phillippi largely corresponds to what happened on the day of Pentecost. You could say that it was antecedent of what was happening in the day of Pentecost. It is something that was happening in advance. Peter was getting to see in seed form what was going to come in a fuller degree on the day of Pentecost. If you will, Caesarea Phillippi is a prophetic intimation of what took place in the day of Pentecost because you see the Lord was telling Peter, He was expanding on that revelation that Peter had about His Person. He said, “Yes, that is right, and upon this Rock, His own Person, I will My church. We know that that began to happen on the day of Pentecost.

So if we look closely at the two passages, we can see that there is indeed a correspondence between what was happening in that so-called confession of Peter and what was happening in the day of Pentecost. But the reason I want to see this is because both passages, in a way, complement each other. It is not that they just correspond, but there are some principles that we need both passages to see in a fuller way. These principles are somehow related to this matter of the expression of the heavenly vision in the church.

The Father Revealed Jesus As the Christ

So we will look at a few parallels between the two passages. Number one, which is the most obvious, was the human vessel that was being used in that revelation in Caesarea Phillippi, which of course was Peter. He was the one receiving it, and in a way, he was being used as a spokesperson for the other disciples. It is not that he was the only one that saw it, but he was articulating it. It is kind of interesting because even when he was called at the very beginning, he was not the first disciple that met the Lord Jesus. It was his brother that brought him to Christ, (John chapter 1). And you remember what Andrew said to Peter in that day? So he spent a few hours with John; it is such a beautiful story. John the Baptist says, “Behold the Lamb of God.” John and Andrew, we only know that it is John because he was hiding himself there in the whole book, right? But Andrew and another disciple, which is John, the one writing, said that when they heard Jesus, they immediately started following Him. And Jesus turned around and said, “What do you

want?” And they said, “Lord, where do You abide?” And He said, “Come and see.” And John was very precise, even telling how long they stayed there, maybe until the 10th hour, which was probably 4:00 p.m. And in just a few hours, Andrew leaves to find his brother and said to him: “We have found the Messiah.” There was no sign, nothing spectacular happened that day, but it was just being in the presence of this One for a few hours, the One whom we are talking about. Immediately, they knew one thing: “This is the Messiah; we have found Him.” And Andrew brought Peter to the Lord Jesus. So in a way, I am just reminding you of that part of the story because Peter’s confession was not that it was something that was completely new in a way, but it was being articulated right there, and probably the Lord was referring that the revelation was something that had already happened in his life or it is kind of developing and growing in his life, the revelation about who the Lord Jesus really is. As the little booklet says, “Indeed, how more than a carpenter He is! You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

The Holy Spirit Revealed the Lord Jesus

Now this is Caesarea of Phillippi. When you come to the day of Pentecost, again, something about the Lord Jesus was being revealed. It is the meat, if you will, of that message of Peter. It is all about Him. You know what was happening; it was the Holy Spirit. But do you know why? It was because of Jesus. He lived such a life, and He died by the plan of God. He rose from the dead and because of that this was happening. That is the revelation given now by the Holy Spirit. In a way, you have the whole triune God. Two of them were there in the day of Pentecost. The Father was revealing, the Son was expanding, and the Holy Spirit in the day of Pentecost, was again revealing the Lord Jesus. And Peter was the same human vessel in both cases.

Here is another parallel. Obviously, Christ was that focal point in both places. “You are the Christ;” that is the basis of everything that follows in Caesarea of Phillippi. How about the day of Pentecost? Isn’t that exactly the same pattern? Why was this happening? Why was the Holy Spirit coming down for His purpose? Peter’s explanation, “Oh, because of Jesus; He is the basis. In Caesarea of Phillippi upon this rock, upon My own Person I will build My church. In the day of Pentecost, because He lived, He died, and He rose again is the reason you are seeing these scenes.

The Anointing of Jesus for His Earthly Ministry

Let me just remind you of one thing, by the way. You notice that there is something that we have to reconcile, and I mentioned that briefly in the previous message, so I will just repeat it to you.

In Matthew chapter 16, Peter said, “You are the Christ.” Later, the Lord Jesus commanded those disciples not to say a word about the fact that He was the Christ until later when He rose from the dead, and then He was going to explain. But in the day of Pentecost, we have something a little different. The conclusion of the whole message is that God was making Jesus, this Jesus that died, that rose again, that is now exalted, both Lord and Christ. He is the Christ, but He is being made Christ, so how do you reconcile that? Well, Christ means “the anointed.” And our Lord Jesus in the days of His flesh was still here on earth, and He was indeed anointed in the Jordan River. You remember that in His baptism, the Holy Spirit came down and remained upon

Him, which enabled all His earthly ministry. Not only that, He enabled even the offering of the Lord Jesus, who offered Himself by the eternal Spirit.

Jesus Was Anointed for His Heavenly Ministry

Now on the day of Pentecost there was another anointing happening. It was something very specific and very explicit actually. God was making Him Lord and Christ. He was being anointed, but it was now no longer the earthly ministry, it was the heavenly ministry. So you see, there is a correspondence and a compliment of sorts in both passages. You are the Christ, but in the day of Pentecost He was being made Christ. And more important, “I will build My church in Caesarea Phillippi, a prophetic intimation of something still in the future which would be in the day of Pentecost that that building process would begin.

So in many ways, we see this wonderful correspondence between the two passages. Let me mention one more. I think it is in order that we mention this.

The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven

“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” Now I believe there are multiple meanings to this. It always refers to authority being given, and if you read carefully in Matthew, this is mentioned twice. It is mentioned specifically to Peter in chapter 16, and later in chapter 18 it is something that the Lord gives to the whole church—the keys of the kingdom to bind and to loose. But in a way, Peter received those keys of the kingdom of heaven in a very specific way; he opened something. He was the human vessel through which the Holy Spirit began something. And if you look carefully, *he* is in the plural. In the day of Pentecost, there were 120 disciples which were all Jews, and all of them were being baptized in one Spirit into one body.

Then later, in the same book of Acts, chapter 10, we find that the house of Cornelius, who was a Gentile, a Roman Centurion, and Peter was being sent there. And what happened was that again he testified about our Lord Jesus, and the Holy Spirit came down. Later, Peter explained what happened because he was being interrogated by the brothers from Jewish background back in Jerusalem. They got all alarmed because, “Now you are having interactions with Gentiles?” And he explained, “Yes, the Holy Spirit came upon them just as He had come upon us. And I remember what the Lord said, ‘You will be baptized in the Holy Spirit.’ So there are only two places in Acts that you see about the baptism in the Holy Spirit—the day of Pentecost and the house of Cornelius. In the day of Pentecost you have the Jews coming in. In the house of Cornelius, the Gentiles came in, and in Christ now there is no Jew no Greek or Gentile, but we are one body in Christ. So those are the keys that Peter used to introduce the kingdom of heavens.

The Gates of Hades Shall Not Prevail Against My Church

Now I want to mention two other points that are kind of parallel but they are also explicit. I would like to use most of my time between these two points.

Our Lord Jesus stayed in that expansion of the revelation given to Peter: “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

You do not see this specifically in the day of Pentecost. But when we look at the book of Acts as a whole, this is wonderfully manifested, wonderfully fulfilled. The gates of Hades in all turns were trying to stop, were opposing, and persecuting. They were doing all sorts of things to try to put an end to that expression of Christ through the church. And the wonderful facts that we see in the book of Acts is that the gates of Hades cannot prevail because the Lord Jesus said, "I will build My church upon this rock and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." It was an unstoppable expression that was happening right there. But I have to remind you, and it is right there in the book of Acts. When the spiritual condition of the church is where the Lord wants it to be, where the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit is a reality, when the Lord Jesus is indeed Lord and Christ, the gates of Hades try to move against it.

So in the whole book you see the principle time after time. I will have to read for you another quote which is from T. Austin Sparks, and our brother is talking about this matter. He said something that I feel is really helpful to understand this matter relating to "the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."

God Moves, Satan Countermoves, and God Has the Final Move

He said, "The book of Acts resolves itself in this: God moves, Satan countermoves, and God has the final move every single time."

If you look at the book of Acts carefully, if you just bring to memory what is happening in all the stories, if you will, you will see that that pattern is there time after time. The Lord moves, God is doing something, and the enemy tries to block it. The enemy, the gates of Hades are trying to prevail against what the Lord is doing, and God has the final move every time. We will look at a few instances of that because I believe this is something important, especially, brothers and sisters, in the time in which we live.

The Lame Beggar Healed

In chapter 3, you remember the story of that lame man who was by the gates of the temple. And Peter and John passed by, and they healed him, a mighty work of the Lord. It was not just the healing; the gospel was preached, 5,000 more come to the Lord, and immediately there was a reaction. The authorities arrested Peter and John. And the next day they were interrogated and finally the lame man is like unrefutable evidence. The man was lame, and then he was healed. How do you counter that evidence? They were not really doing a crime; "so we will threaten them really good, and let them go. But do you remember what happened after that? They went immediately and gathered with the whole church, and they prayed. After that, the result was the answer. There was an earthquake, the place was shaken, and there was more boldness to preach. What happened that day was multiplied. Do you see the pattern? God did something, Satan tried to stop it, and immediately, the Lord had the final word.

The Martyrdom of Stephen

Think of Stephen. It was a very short account of that brother that was given but a very wonderful account. Stephen was in the climax of that ministry. After he was serving the table, it seems that progressively the Lord started using him in some way to minister the word, to testify

about the Lord Jesus, and finally they could not take it anymore. He was arrested and brought with all his wonderful testimony before the Sanhedrin, and he was martyred. So again, it seems that God was doing something through Stephen.

Satan was moving, but what was the result of the death of our brother that day? You remember that that was the occasion why the gospel started going out of Jerusalem through Judea and through Samaria and prevailing a much wider area. Perhaps even more importantly, as our brother was speaking to us yesterday morning, because of that do you see what the Lord was doing? It was almost the irony of the whole thing; they were trying to stop this work and Stephen indeed goes to be with the Lord. Oh, but what kind of seed was planted when he died on that day? Saul was the one, the main witness against him, the one in some way authorizing the whole thing. That is what is implied when they leave those cloaks at his feet. He was the one with authority to let that happen and approving that. Oh, but out of that, as our brother reminded us, some goads were kind of poking Saul, and he tried to silence those goads with redoubling his efforts to persecute and stop this, but finally the Lord arrested him. You see God moving first, Satan counter-moving, and the Lord having the final word.

The Martyrdom of James

Let's consider the story of James dying in chapter 12. We do not know the circumstances, but he was the first among the twelve apostles that died, who was martyred by Herod. And Peter was arrested, and it seemed as if he was to be the next one. Oh, it was the work of Satan, but what happened? Instead of Peter dying, because it was not his time, the Lord had different plans. The Lord has the final word, doesn't He? He was released, and Herod was the one that was eaten by warts. And at the end of chapter 12, we read that the Word of the Lord was being multiplied.

Paul's Imprisonment in Rome

Think of Paul; is there an example there? His whole life seems to be an illustration of that principle in Acts. He had such a fruitful life, such a fruitful ministry, including the three missionary journeys that we have recorded, starting from chapter 13, Paul was finally arrested. God moves, Satan countermoves, and it seems that's it; it was the end of his ministry. He was arrested, and he could not move around anymore. It was the end of such a fruitful ministry; but was it? Do you see what the Lord did out of that? Today, we have in our hands, the deepest things in the Word of God, the deepest writings. They came out of that imprisonment. Who is in charge, brothers and sisters?

And remember, when we read what was happening in the book of Acts, I think we are having it, in a way, very mildly. We see terrible things happening there. If any of us had to be in the sea for a few hours, we may give up. When you read what was happening in chapter 27 in that shipwreck, it is a frightening story. And it was not just a few hours, it was for ten days. All hope of being saved disappeared. But who had the final say? the final move? And what was the result of that, brothers and sisters?

I will give you my second quote of the day, again from our brother, T. Austin Sparks, and he says this, "That in Acts the sovereignty of the Lord is riding on the tempest of hell's outbreak. Let me repeat it for you: "The sovereignty of the Lord is riding on the tempest of hell's outbreak."

How wonderful is that! What an assurance, brothers and sisters. Everything is hell's offering; it is happening. Who is having the final word? He is riding on that tempest and fulfilling every single bit of His purpose.

So brothers and sisters, may the Lord open our eyes on this matter because as we read, and I am reading it for a second time, the Apostle John tells us back then in the first century, we are in the last hour. But the more we approach the end of the last hour, I believe that is the time that we are in right now, approaching very rapidly the end of the last hour, and the more that happens, oh we should make no mistake, the conflict is about to intensify. It has been intensifying, of course. It should not be a surprise to us. Oh, but if our eyes are open to see that the Lord uses that, He rides on the tempest of Hell's outbreak. Thank the Lord.

Rest Under the Shadow of the Almighty

Psalms 91:1 comes to mind, and I believe we need this word from the Lord, that the Lord may write it upon our hearts.

"He who dwell in the shelter of the most High, I will abide in the shadow of the Almighty."

I like the translation that reads, "He will rest in the shadow of the Almighty."

What a need, brothers and sisters. And you remember the contents of this Psalm. Moses was talking about all sort of things, all sort of threats, deadly threats, a thousand falling on one side, ten thousand on the other. When you read the book of Revelation, we need to have our eyes open to that. We cannot say, "la, la, la," about those things because what you read in those most terrible judgments and things happening in the book of Revelation, it seems to be a book where there is so much death; death after death after death. But how does the book begin? What is in chapter 1 of the book of Revelation? "Our Lord Jesus risen, glorified, triumphant. I have the keys of death and Hades in My hands."

Brothers and sisters, if we rest under the shadow of the Almighty is there anything that we should fear? Oh, may the Lord open our eyes because this is something that at the end of the last hour, how much we need that the Holy Spirit would make this real in each one of us! "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."

Get Behind Me, Satan!

Now there is another principle that is also another parallel I am calling it between what is happening in Caesarea Philippi and the book of Acts at large. It has to do with the events that follow right after the declaration that Peter makes, and it is connected; it is not two different stories. It is part of the same events that was happening in that day. So you remember that after our Lord said, "I will build My church," and He revealed to His disciples that the way that this is going to be done, the starting point of it all will be Him giving His life, dying on a cross. This is the first time our Lord mentions that to the disciples right after. It is quite a contrast, isn't it? "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Verse 21: "From that time, (very specific) Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day."

And as soon as He said that, something inside Peter, the same vessel that was being given that wonderful revelation, ten minutes later, something within him did not sit well about that declaration: "You are the Christ," oh, that is wonderful, "You are the Son of the living God," and he is being sincere. But how do you understand that? And you know we need to give him credit. Don't go too quickly in judging Peter. We often say, "Our brother Peter, oh here he comes again. He did not get it here, he did not get it there." I think sometimes we are very quick in our judgment because he was a good Jew. And that is the mentality. They were expecting Him as the Messiah that is glorious. That is the prevalent expectation about what Messiah would be, someone that would deliver them from Rome, to make them again the head of the nations, not the tail. How is it possible that Messiah is going to die? That did not sit well with Peter, and Peter, I personally have no question in my heart, no doubt that Peter, out of his best intentions, perhaps out of his natural love for his Master, said, "God forbid it, Lord." He took the Lord aside in verse 22: "This shall never happen to You." I would say that is more than just his reflective reaction as a good Jew, but the results of his natural love for his Master; natural compassion: "I do not want this to happen." Hey, if I were there, oh boy, do you think we would do anything different from that? But what the Lord said to Peter next is really of the utmost importance because it was very severe first of all which in itself should be eye opening. The Lord said one of the most severe words to any person in Scripture to the disciple that had just received such revelation.. He said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interest, but man's."

His Church Can Never Be Built Based on Natural Life

And that brings this question, of course, "Why would the Lord be so extremely severe with Peter?" I believe He was demonstrating a fundamental truth. It was an expansion of that revelation that was being given to Peter. First, who the Lord Jesus is, which the Lord expands, "I will build My church upon that Rock, My Person, yes, but now here comes another, because that revelation was expanding. Here is the fundamental principle that He was demonstrating. His church can never be built on the basis of natural life; never! "I will build My church," you have to keep that in mind when you read what He says, "Get behind Me, Satan!" because the two are connected. It is as if the Lord is saying to Peter: "Peter, if that building is going to happen, oh, every bit of your uncrucified self-life, not just the bad parts which we understand should be done away with, the sinful stuff, yes; we understand that. But even the good stuff, natural compassion, natural loving, things that are apart from Me, things that somehow are in a collision course with My will. That has to go. If that does not go, the church is never going to be built.

There is still one thing that is also I believe being rebuked, and it is a very, very strong rebuke. Again, in my mind I cannot remember others that are as strong as this, and here is the thing. We have to remember that in the fall of man, something happened that fundamentally changed the nature of man. Something happened there in the garden after the fall. It is as if Satan injected his own nature into the bloodstream of natural life. And not just the bad parts of natural life; we

understand that. Everything that is sinful in us: “Well, this is terrible; this has to go. Yes, Amen.” But even what is good natural things, if it is apart from the Lord, the venom of Satanic nature has been injected into that in the fall. Do you understand why the Lord is being so severe with Peter? It is as if the Lord is saying, “Peter, if that goes uncrucified, if that does not go to the cross, the building of My church will not happen. And remember, He has just said, “You are Peter, you are part of that, you are a rock in that building, in that spiritual house. But Peter, it has to be only what is of my nature in you, that new nature that you received. That is what is meant to be built upon this rock of My Person. Anything that belongs to the old creation has to go by the way of the cross. And part of why I feel there is indeed a principle being revealed here, a principle that has everything to do with the expression of the heavenly vision in the church. Here is why, brothers and sisters, in what I am calling this venom that was injected in the blood stream of humanity, there is a positive rebellion against the Lordship of Christ. Something within us revolts against His Headship and His Lordship. And I know many of you are going to protest to me. “Oh, come on, you have gone too far now.” No, I submit to Him; there is nothing in me that can be used in the building work of the church.

Here is the deal. You just have to wait for the right buttons to be pushed. Then you are going to see; something will come out that positively revolts against the fundamental facts of the day of Pentecost. What is the fundamental, the conclusion of the message? God has made this Jesus whom you crucified Lord and Christ. There is something within us, brothers and sisters, our natural nature apart from the Lord that revolts against that. Do you understand why the Lord is saying to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan”? He is referring to that old nature inside of Peter.

The Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus Has Set You Free

In Romans 8 we have a declaration from the Apostle Paul that helps us understand why this matter is so critical. Let me read to you two verses from Romans 8.

Verse 7: “Because the mindset on the flesh is hostile toward God.”

Now listen, Romans 8 is not a chapter of our position in Christ. It is a chapter on our experience in the things of the Lord. We have to have that clear. In Romans chapter 6, you have a position, and what a glorious position is given to us by His grace.

Romans 6:6: “Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him.”

So now the body of sin does not need to be under the slavery. The old man was crucified is a position. It is glorious; nothing will change that.

But in Romans 7, it is as if Paul is kind of regressing because he is not describing his experience. He is the best Christian around, and in the present tense, he says, “Oh, the good that I am trying to do, I cannot do. The evil that I hate, I end up doing.” In the present tense he is not describing an experience that he had before coming to the Lord. And it seems like a strange thing to say after what he said in chapter 6, that our old man was crucified with Christ, that now we can walk in newness of life, that now we should reckon ourselves dead to sin but alive to God; that is our position in chapter 6, but in our experience, isn’t it true that oftentimes we are just stuck in Romans 7? And here is Paul trying, which is the famous observation. Just count the I’s,

the pronouns in chapter 7, and compare, and do the same count in chapter 8. Count the I's in chapter 7: "I, I, I, I, this is a little exercise for the reader. I think it is more than twenty times. "I am trying, I am doing, I am feeling, and at the end of the chapter, oh, thank God for Jesus Christ, our Lord. After he said, "Who is going to deliver me from this corpse that is attached to me? That is how he felt, that he himself in charge was a corpse. The only result from that is death. Here is the way out, brothers and sisters, the Lord Jesus is the way out. Thank God, for Jesus Christ.

Then you have chapter 8, and what a glorious chapter! What a wonderful chapter! Now there is no condemnation. The condemnation is chapter 7; "Oh, that we could dissolve the death;" is a condemnation, isn't it? But now there is no more condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Why? Because "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death." You see, the Holy Spirit is the One that comes to make all that is real in Christ a reality in you, and when that is our experience we are free. Then the whole chapter continues.

But then he goes back in chapter 8, not describing your experience. It is no longer just your position. Let's go back to verse 7: "The mind set on the flesh is hostile to our God," because as believers we have that option. We still have to do a daily decision: "Am I going to set my mind on the things of the Lord, or the things of my own self-life, independent from the Lord?" But he is very clear here. When our mind is set on the things of the flesh, our natural life apart from the Lord is something hostile toward God. For it does not subject its self to the law of God for it is not even able to do so.

Verse 8: "And those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

Now let me make it very clear, brothers and sisters. He is not referring here to unbelievers. Remember the context of chapter 8. It follows his own experience of trying, trying his best efforts, very zealous, but all that is his own good flesh, "trying" to please the Lord. And the verdict is that those who are in the flesh cannot please God. Don't you see that, in a way, that is Peter's experience? When out of his good intentions he said, "God forbid, Lord, this will never happen to You." That was Peter in his good flesh, in his best intentions, and the verdict is given here: "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

It is as if in this passage a brother said, "The Holy Spirit is dragging out what our flesh is and exposing it for what it really is. We are very deluded about ourselves. We know we have that part, but we have some things that are not so bad, and those things we sometimes try to encourage, to develop, and the Lord is saying, "Apart from Me, no, nothing." And that is the explanation for "the get behind Me, Satan."

Why I believe that this is very intimately connected to the book of Acts. Because in the book of Acts we have a glorious picture of the principle playing out in a positive way. That natural element that cannot submit to the Lord, that is positively hostile to God is gone. Why? The Holy Spirit is in charge, isn't it?

The Holy Spirit is in Charge

We get to see a little bit of that in the day of Pentecost, and I mentioned it briefly. Here it goes again. How does the whole message of Peter begin? It is with a phrase that you say after you

read the gospel, “Is this even possible to have? And Peter stood up with the eleven. Wow! Just that phrase! Read it and compare it with the narrative of the gospels. They were fighting; who is the first? The two brothers tried to maneuver the others and said, “Lord, left and right?” And the others got all angry at them. Brothers and sisters, from the day of Pentecost on, the Holy Spirit is in charge, that personal element since the garden is out of the picture. That natural element that is self-seeking, which we all know very well what it means. It is all there in us in a latent way. Somehow, it got completely out of the picture, and the Holy Spirit is in charge. The Holy Spirit is given His sovereign place, and the whole book of Acts demonstrates in a very positive way that wonderful principle being played out. What the Lord reveals to Peter in Caesarea of Phillippi is the great hindrance for the expression of the heavenly vision in the church, it is me; it is my self-life apart from the Lord.

I have to clarify that. Sometimes we can have a wrong understanding on this matter, and we can get super mystical and think, “Well, you know. I have to suppress my personality; I can no longer be myself.” That is not what is meant at all. We are talking about natural life apart from the Lord. Let’s go through that and use Peter as an illustration. How do you see Peter’s personality in the gospels? He was pretty outgoing, pretty bold, pretty impulsive; it is very clear.

Under New Management

Now in reading Acts, what would you say about the first twelve chapters of Acts? Peter is that central character in those chapters. What would you say when you read the story of Peter in Acts? I see the exact same personality, the same energetic man, very impulsive, but there was a crucial difference. Now you have Peter under new management. I think it was Brother Lance that said that, but you get the picture. The Lord is not out there to change our personality. Actually, He made you the way you are in a way. He gave you that personality. As Brother Kaung would say, “It is the shape of your soul.” Even as you have a body that is unique, and when it comes to personality, the Lord made it with that exact shape, but it got marred by the fall, didn’t it? It got marred by our self-seeking, that nature that has the venom from Satan.

Now our position is in Christ, which is our inheritance, and that personality will be under a new management of the Holy Spirit, and what a difference it makes. It is as if your true self comes to rise, and you can be exactly what the Lord meant for you to be under His control, in dependence on Him, never apart from Him. And when we step into independence, which we often have that tendency to do, immediately something within will tell you, “Not good, no life here. There is death here,” and thank the Lord for that. That is our safeguard; that is our security. We can run back to Him and say, “Lord, no, it is Christ in me; it is no longer I. If it is me, it is no good.” But do you see what I mean? I am not saying that your personality is being eliminated; it is just that that independent self is going to receive that glow from that cross, and what a blessing! Some people think that this is heavy. I think that is our salvation; that is our deliverance. If our eyes are open to see what it really means being crucified with Christ, we are going to praise the Lord for the rest of our lives every single day because the Lord dealt with the source of the trouble finally on His cross. And now you can be every single bit that He made you to be in Christ under the leading of the Holy Spirit.

When it comes to the expression of the heavenly vision in the church, this is crucial. This is what the Lord is conveying to Peter and to us in that very dramatic event: “Get behind Me, Satan.” Not a bit of this can go on, otherwise the, “I will build My church does not happen.”

The Sovereignty of the Holy Spirit

So in Acts we see a wonderful example, chapter after chapter of the Holy Spirit being in charge. No wonder that there is such an expression. No wonder that the church is being built in the most wonderful way. As we think on the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, let me put it this way. I am using this term, the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, almost interchangeably with the Lord Jesus being Lord because that is exactly what the Holy Spirit came to do in the day of Pentecost. He came to anoint Jesus Lord and Christ, and when we depart from that basis, that’s it. The trouble is there. When Jesus is Lord and Christ indeed, not just position, but in reality in our lives. What a glorious expression! And that is the book of Acts. So you have various examples, and the Holy Spirit is in charge to make that real. It is chapter after chapter.

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

I remember at least three instances here. In chapter 8 you have something that is very counter intuitive, Philip in Samaria is a result of the aftermath of Stephen being martyred. And the Lord sovereignly turned that into a tremendous move of outreach into Judea and Samaria, and there is Philip in Samaria. And so many Samaritans came to the Lord, and all that wonderful story. And all of a sudden in the middle of that revival, the Holy Spirit said to Philip: “You go to the road to Gaza.” By the way, there was not a single soul there. That sounds to me king of intuitive. “How am I here in the middle of one of the greatest revivals so far in the book of Acts, and then I go to that place of famine and all this?” And thank the Lord, he obeyed. You see, that is the key in this book of Acts. The Holy Spirit is given His proper place, and He is being obeyed. They listened to His voice.

Peter and Cornelius

Think of Peter on that day that preceded the house of Cornelius. Wow! That to me is even stronger than this because Peter, a very good Jew, as we just saw in Caesarea of Philippi, and all of a sudden he was having that vision when the Lord is preparing him for something. And he sees the sheep coming, unclean, non-kosher food, and he hears a voice. He must really have been hungry because people were preparing the lunch for him. Then he saw the animals there, and the voice said, “Peter, kill and eat.” It was a revelation from heaven, and he goes, “Never, Lord, I cannot do that.” And the thing was so strong, how can you blame him? “Don’t do it.” That was the cultural tendency, that which was his upbringing, and that which was, frankly speaking, God’s revelation up to that point which was against everything that he knew. But one thing he knows, that this is the Holy Spirit, and three times he resisted that, and finally there comes the party from Cornelius’ house, knocking at the door: “Is there a certain Simon there?” And the Holy Spirit spoke to him: “Listen to this man, and do not be afraid,” and Peter obeyed.

Sometimes we wonder, why there was such a glorious expression in those days, and we see perhaps so little today. We are in the same age, brothers and sisters. But what the Lord brought in in the day of Pentecost has not changed. It is still our portion, but do we listen to the Holy

Spirit? Is He sovereign? And you know the rest of the story. Oh, it is like Pentecost part B. That is what happened in the house of Corelius. Now the Greeks, the Gentiles were being baptized in one body.

Circumcision of Gentiles Believers

Think of the problem that happened, the doctrine of pride. When the Gentiles were being saved and those with a more Jewish bend, and one of them was to be circumcised. And they had all that debating, which was a big counsel, and they were debating as to what they should do, whether to impose on them circumcision, and all that. And they came to a conclusion somehow. They explained at the end in the letter why they came to that conclusion. They said, "They wrote a letter to the brethren in Antioch: "It seemed well to us and to the Holy Spirit that you should do this thing here, and do not worry about what is happening." It was the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit making the Lord Jesus Lord indeed, but He was the expression.

That is completely connected in my mind to what was happening in of Phillippi because when it is me in charge, when it is our natural life, the Holy Spirit is no longer in charge. The flesh again sets its mind against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh (Galatians 5). They were in an antagonistic situation. This is the glorious story that we read in Acts as a whole.

The Declension of the Church

When you come to Revelation chapters 2-3, we read just one of the letters, the letter to Laodicea. You know that was happening. It was just one generation after the close of the book of Acts. Perhaps it was two generations roughly after the day of Pentecost. So if the day of Pentecost is happening in 30 AD, as most scholars believe, Revelation was written probably in the early nineties. There could be a little debate on this, but I believe that is the ball park. It was a very short period between the day of Pentecost and Revelation 2-3.

Now let me ask you: What is the general condition of the churches in Revelation 2-3? And the seven churches there are just a representation of the church as a whole, seven being that number of completeness. The seven churches represent the church as a whole. In the majority of them something was wrong. Something in their spiritual condition seems to be not on the right track. We just read Laodicea, but that applies to all of them. There was a hindrance, the hindrance of natural life had intruded into the church as early as two generations after the day of Pentecost. Is the Holy Spirit being heeded? We read at the end of every single letter, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Why? The implication is that perhaps the majority were not listening to the Holy Spirit. Now as you know, I will try to mention this really quickly, you have seven golden lampstands; that is the symbol of the church as a whole in those first three chapters. Actually, it is such an apt symbol when you think on the theme that was assigned to me because we are talking about the heavenly vision expressed in the church. And a lampstand is all about it existing, you can say, for the expression of the light. That is what a lampstand is, but not in our days. In our days it is an antique that you buy, you put it in the corner of your living room, but you never turn it on, and that's it. People admire the thing in itself, but that was not so in those days.

A lampstand was something that existed to express light. It was not something in itself. Do you see the picture here? That is what the church is; she exists to express Christ not herself. She exists that that heavenly vision, the testimony of Jesus may shine through her, and that was the wonderful picture of the lampstand. What was the source that made that possible? It was a source external to the lampstand. That expression of light happened because of oil, the type of the Holy Spirit consistent in the Word of God.

Now let me ask you. Don't you think that in Revelation 2-3 that supply is going really, really low? But the light is not quite being expressed, and that is the picture of the first three chapters of Revelation as a whole. Our Lord Jesus was walking among the seven lampstands, a priestly picture. He is our High Priest examining; it is one of the things a priest would do in the days of the Old Testament. He would have to examine the lampstand and make sure that everything was in order, that the supply of oil was there, that the wick was trimmed, etc. And our Lord Jesus is walking among the seven lampstands, a picture, a life being expressed.

The Church Entered the Judges' State

We know that was not quite the case, and because of that, seven times there was the call: "He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." It is as if in Revelation 2-3 the church entered into a Judges' state, the book of Judges. There was no longer a possession of the lamp. There was no longer what they were meant to be. The book of Joshua corresponds to the book of Acts, pretty much like Revelation 2-3 corresponds to the book of Judges. In Joshua you have the people possessing the land, triumphant. Yes, there were problems, but they were dealt with. They turned to the Lord just like in the book of Acts. The book of Judges was the opposite. There was no king in Israel. The sovereignty of the Lord was not a reality.

Let me put it this way, thinking on the book of Acts. The Lord Jesus was not Lord and Christ indeed. He is, of course, but He was not a reality among His people. And that is Revelation 2-3. In Laodicea we see a very specific way of the condition of the church at the end of the last hour. But we believe that Laodicea represents the condition of the church in a special way at the very end of this age. And what do we see, brothers and sisters? Again, is Christ being seen there? They are lukewarm, self-sufficient, I can barely think of something more contradictory to what Christian life is supposed to be. "Without Me you can do nothing," the Lord says. "I am rich; I need nothing." There is a complacency in nakedness, in poverty, and supremely for the purpose of our meditation, there is a blindness that has set in. They are no longer seeing, and therefore the Lord has to say to them: "You do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind."

The Call to Overcome

Brothers and sisters, thank the Lord because in His grace there is a provision. The Lord does not desire for His church to remain in that condition, and He makes a provision for them to come out of this. I just have to mention one thing. If Revelation 2-3 reveal the state of the church, the abnormal state of the church that has characterized so much of church history, we thank the Lord He has a way to restore that, to recover that. Did you notice? What is He doing in those seven letters that indicate to us His way for that expression to be back again for Him to be expressed, for the lampstands to be in the condition that He wants. The Lord makes a call to overcomers at

the end of each one of the seven letters: “To he who overcomes,” and there is a progress in each one of them. Why, brothers and sisters? This is the way of the Lord to restore things. And when we are thinking and meditating on the expression of the heavenly vision in the church, this is really, really crucial for us to have our eyes open to this because the Lord never gave up on His church as a whole. Never! And He will never do that. That is not the point. But the Lord knows that when a majority is in an abnormal condition, and a majority is not responding to Him, the Lord’s method to restore the whole church starts through an advanced party which the Bible calls the overcomers, a remnant, and that is why there is a call at the end of each one of the seven churches: “To him who overcomes” is a call that is not being heeded at large, but through those who overcome. What is to overcome in the context to put it very simply? The promise to the overcomers is always paired with the declaration: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Full Harvest Follows the Harvest of First Fruits

So to put it very, very simply. What is an overcomer in this conference? It is those who hear the Holy Spirit, those who put Him in His proper position of sovereignty and if He is in His proper position, Christ is Lord, Jesus is Lord and Christ indeed in reality. This at the very end of the day is the essence of overcoming. Jesus is Lord indeed, and through that there is a recovery of that expression of the heavenly vision. It begins in that group, in a way, of the overcomers. You could say that they are the remnant, but thinking of that harvest. In a harvest you always have first fruits which is a part of the harvest that matures first. Now if you are a farmer, what do you do? Do you harvest the first fruits and then say, “Okay, that’s it, drop them and forget the rest.” No, you harvest the first fruits, and that in a way is the first step, the rest will come eventually. That is the idea of the overcomers which is so misunderstood. A lot of people think that this is the spiritual elite, a people apart from the church. Not at all! It is just a part of the church that is listening to the Holy Spirit and doing that in behalf of the whole.

Do not Despise the Day of Small Things

The Lord, at the end of the last hour, has to raise those that listen to Him, that are being overcomers when Jesus is Lord indeed. Now let me just mention something. There is a great temptation as far as I can tell, if you have a desire to follow the Lord all the way through, if you have a desire to make Christ Lord indeed and to be counted as one of those that answers this call to overcome, I feel that it is almost inevitable that we may become discouraged. You may look around and see the condition of the church at large and say, “Well, I do not think this can ever work. I think this is too much. It is like the books of Nehemiah and Ezra when you read them and say, “Wow! There is so much ruin all over the place.” But there was a wonderful time with the overcomers in that small remnant that went back to Jerusalem from the exile. They were just 50,000 who went back. Think about it. I believe that the number of the Jews that were in exile in those days, and some people have put it around a million plus, something like that. 50,000 was a tiny little number, and they went back to such a monumental work. And when they started the work, you just have to read the prophets of those days, Zechariah, Haggai. In their eyes, what they were doing, sometimes they got under that sense of discouragement. It was like Zechariah

asked, “Who has despised the day of small beginnings?” Because they were tempted exactly to that, “It is kind of boring. How is this ever going to be restored?”

In Haggai, as the people looked at the house they were building, especially for those that had seen the glory in the house of Solomon, they said, “No, this is almost like nothing.” Brothers and sisters, this could be a temptation to us, and I feel very strongly that we need, by the grace of the Lord, to have our vision resurrected to our Lord Jesus Himself, not to the conditions around us, not to the circumstances, let alone our own estimation of things, and say, “No, this is never going to work.” Oh, if you look at Him, if that heavenly vision captures us, I think that changes completely the equation because it is now not about if that heavenly vision has captured us, it does not matter the conditions around you. If I see that something is being successful or not, it does not matter. What matters is the Lord Himself.

Caught, Kept, and Constrained by the Love of Christ

I will finish with one verse. It is something that both my brothers Dana and David have brought up in a very wonderful way. It seems that at the end of the day, there is a secret ingredient in this matter, especially in the last days. If the heavenly vision is going to be expressed, is going to be responded to, and if it is going to hold us to the end, it can never be in the days of my grit, my determination. You know how long that lasts, right? “Yes, I will keep that heavenly vision.” And what if the love of Christ constrains you. What if we see, oh the grace behind His calling. What are we to be called to be a part of Christ? Who are we to be united with Him? That is our calling.

At the end of Scripture you know that the new Jerusalem is a city and a bride. Let me just mention this. Brother Lance really liked to say this, and always when I heard it, it blessed me. Marriage is the deepest relationship, and it is the most intimate relationship known to humanity. You are united to another person. Who am I, who are we? to be one with the Son of God? That is your calling to be one, united for eternity with Him, starting now. Don’t you think that if we see that, that the eyes of our heart changes some? Don’t you think that all the discouragement that we may have by seeing circumstances and what is going on around us, if we see that is my call, that He has loved me so, we can trust Him to keep us.

How do you explain Paul’s life except that it was something that was kept not in himself. He was a great man; there is no question, but even Paul could never do that. He was being held by the love of Christ constraining him, and we judge this, “That one died for us, therefore, we all died. And from now on we live not for ourselves, but for the One that died and rose again for us.”

Lord, we pray that indeed as we remember together the grace and love behind our calling, open our eyes afresh. We do not want this to be a technical matter, a matter where we understand what is going on in our minds alone. We pray that that love of the Lord Jesus, that love that surpasses understanding would indeed capture us even as we behold You, Lord; yes! And Lord, we pray, have Your way even in this last hour, that we may be kept in that which was from the beginning, even Your blessed Person, Your blessed work made real in us by Your Holy Spirit. We pray these things in Your precious name. Amen.

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