

COOPERATING WITH THE HEAVENLY MINISTRY OF THE ASCENDED CHRIST

(Friday—Second Morning Session)

Message Two

The Apostolic Ministry in Cooperation with Christ's Heavenly Ministry to Shepherd the Church of God as His Flock for the Building Up of the Body of Christ

Scripture Reading: John 10:11, 16; 21:15-17; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4; Heb. 13:20; Rev. 1:13; 2:1, 7

- I. Psalms 22 through 24 are a group of psalms revealing Christ from His crucifixion through His shepherding to His kingship in the coming age:**
 - A. Psalm 23, which concerns Christ as the Shepherd in His resurrection and ascension, is the bridge between Christ's redeeming death and His church-producing resurrection in Psalm 22 and Christ's coming back as the King, who will regain the entire earth through the church as His Body in Psalm 24.
 - B. In His heavenly ministry Christ is shepherding people, and we need to cooperate with Him by shepherding people; if this fellowship is received by us, there will be a big revival on the earth to bring the Lord back.

- II. John 21 reveals the apostolic ministry in cooperation with Christ's heavenly ministry; it is the completion and consummation of the Gospel of John:**
 - A. The Gospel of John has twenty-one chapters, but it actually ends with chapter 20.
 - B. The entire book covers the earthly ministry of Christ, beginning with His incarnation as the Word of God to become a man in the flesh (1:14) and ending with His resurrection as the last Adam to become the life-giving Spirit (20:22); hence, chapter 21 should be an appendix.
 - C. Although it is correct to say this, it is more intrinsic to say that John 21 is the completion and consummation of the Gospel of John; it consummates the entire Gospel of John by showing that Christ's heavenly ministry and the apostles' ministry on the earth cooperate together to carry out God's economy.

- III. In John 10:10-11 and 16 the Lord unveiled to the disciples that He was the good Shepherd who came that the sheep might have life abundantly and that He had other sheep (the Gentiles) which He must lead to join with them (the Jewish believers) to be one flock (one church) under one Shepherd:**
 - A. The Lord's shepherding was firstly in His earthly ministry—Matt. 9:36; cf. 10:1-6.
 - B. The Lord's shepherding is secondly in His heavenly ministry (1 Pet. 5:4) to take care of the church of God, issuing in His Body.

- IV. The Lord commissioned Peter to feed His lambs and shepherd His sheep:**
 - A. When the Lord stayed with His disciples after His resurrection and before His

ascension, in one of His appearances, He commissioned Peter to feed His lambs and shepherd His sheep in His absence, while He is in the heavens—John 21:15-17.

- B. This is to incorporate the apostolic ministry with Christ's heavenly ministry to take care of God's flock, which is the church that issues in the Body of Christ.
- C. Later, in the book of Acts, Peter said, "We will continue steadfastly in prayer and in the ministry of the word" (6:4); this is to cooperate with Christ's heavenly ministry of intercession (Heb. 7:25) and of ministering God into His people (8:2).
- D. Peter was so impressed with this commission of the Lord that in his first book he told the believers that they were like sheep being led astray, but they had now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of their souls—1 Pet. 2:25:
 - 1. Christ indwells us to be our life and everything, but He is also overseeing, observing, the condition and situation of our inner being.
 - 2. He shepherds us by caring for the welfare of our inner being and by exercising His oversight over the condition of our soul, our real person—cf. Heb. 13:17.
- E. Peter exhorts the elders to shepherd the flock of God among them so that when the Chief Shepherd is manifested, they, the faithful elders, will receive the unfading crown of glory—1 Pet. 5:1-4.
- F. Peter's word indicates that the heavenly ministry of Christ is mainly to shepherd the church of God as His flock, which issues in His Body.

V. The following words of the apostle Paul also show the incorporation of the apostolic ministry with Christ's heavenly ministry to take care of God's flock:

- A. In Acts 20:28 Paul told the elders in Ephesus, "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained [or purchased] through His own blood."
- B. Paul said, "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock" (v. 29); the apostle did not care for his own life (v. 24), but he was very concerned for the future of the church, which was a treasure to him and to God.
- C. Paul says in Hebrews 13:20, "God...brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, in the blood of an eternal covenant":
 - 1. The eternal covenant is the covenant of the new testament to gain a flock, which is the church issuing in the Body and consummating the New Jerusalem; the eternal covenant of God is to consummate the New Jerusalem by the shepherding.
 - 2. God raised up our Lord from the dead to be the great Shepherd to consummate the New Jerusalem according to God's eternal covenant.

VI. The main purpose and goal of the apostolic ministry incorporated with Christ's heavenly ministry are to build up the Body of Christ, which will consummate the New Jerusalem for the accomplishment of the eternal economy of God—cf. Eph. 3:2, 8-9; 1 Pet. 5:10.

VII. The matter of shepherding God’s flock for the main purpose and ultimate consummation of the eternal economy of God is even referred to in Song of Songs:

- A. “Tell me, you whom my soul loves, Where do you pasture your flock [for satisfaction]? / Where do you make it lie down at noon [for rest]?”—1:7a.
- B. “Go forth on the footsteps of the flock, / And pasture your young goats / By the shepherds’ tents”—v. 8b.
- C. “My beloved is mine, and I am his; / He pastures his flock among the lilies [the seekers of Christ who live a life of trusting in God with a single heart]”—2:16.
- D. “I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine; / He pastures his flock among the lilies”—6:3.

VIII. To shepherd the believers is very crucial for their growth in life; we must take the shepherding way to preach the gospel and revive the church:

- A. We should pray, “Lord, I want to be revived; from today I want to be a shepherd; I want to go to feed people, to shepherd people, and to flock people together.”
- B. In John 10 and 21 the Lord used three words concerning shepherding: *feed*, *shepherd*, and *flock* (10:16; 21:15-16); we can also use the word *flock* as a verb.
- C. All the churches have to learn how to flock together so that they can be blent together; the elders and co-workers should take the lead to practice this.

IX. The organic maintenance of the golden lampstand is Christ’s heavenly ministry to cherish the churches in His humanity and nourish the churches in His divinity to produce the overcomers through His organic shepherding—Rev. 1:13; 2:7; John 10:11, 14; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4; Heb. 13:20:

- 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 (Rev. 1:13).
 - 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—v. 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; 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, which 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; cf. Exo. 27:20-21; Zech. 4:6, 11-14.
 - 3. To participate in His move and enjoy His care, we must be in the churches.
- X. Through Christ's wonderful shepherding, we will enjoy Him as our blessings both today and for eternity—Isa. 49:10; Rev. 7:9-17.**

Excerpts from the Ministry:

**JOHN 21 BEING THE COMPLETION
AND CONSUMMATION OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN**

The Gospel of John has twenty-one chapters, but it actually ends with chapter twenty. The entire book covers the earthly ministry of Christ, beginning with His incarnation as the Word of God to become a man in the flesh (1:1-14) and ending with His resurrection as the last Adam to become the life-giving Spirit (ch. 20); hence, chapter twenty-one should be an appendix. Although it is correct to say this, it is more intrinsic to say that John 21 is the completion and consummation of the Gospel of John. Without chapter twenty-one, John is not completed. It consummates the entire Gospel of John by showing that Christ's heavenly ministry and the apostles' ministry on the earth cooperate together to carry out God's New Testament economy.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

In John 10:10, 11, and 16 the Lord unveiled to the disciples that He was the good Shepherd who came that the sheep might have life abundantly and that He had other sheep (the Gentiles) which He must lead to join with them (the Jewish believers) to be one flock (one church) under one Shepherd.

In His Earthly Ministry

The Lord's shepherding was firstly in His earthly ministry (Matt. 9:36). The Lord saw the Israelites as sheep harassed by their leaders; they were cast away like sheep not having a shepherd. The Lord as the Shepherd of God's elect prayed, and God told His sent One to appoint twelve apostles that they might take care of the sheep of God (Matt. 10:1-6).

In His Heavenly Ministry

The Lord's shepherding is secondly in His heavenly ministry (1 Pet. 5:4) to take care of the church of God, issuing in His Body. When He was on the earth, He was shepherding. After His resurrection and ascension to the heavens, He is still shepherding.

**COMMISSIONING PETER TO FEED HIS LAMBS
AND SHEPHERD HIS SHEEP**

When the Lord stayed with His disciples after His resurrection and before His ascension, in one of His appearances, He commissioned Peter to feed His lambs and shepherd His sheep in His absence, while He is in the heavens (John 21:15-17). Shepherding implies feeding, but it includes much more than feeding. To shepherd is to take all-inclusive tender care of the flock.

**Incorporating the Apostolic Ministry
with Christ's Heavenly Ministry**

This is to incorporate the apostolic ministry with Christ's heavenly ministry to take care of God's flock, which is the church that issues in the Body of Christ.

The Words of the Apostle Paul concerning Shepherding

The following words of the apostle Paul confirm this.

The Elders' Shepherding the Church of God

In Acts 20:28 Paul told the elders of Ephesus, "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained [or, purchased] through His own blood." Although Paul was on an urgent trip back to Jerusalem, while he was journeying he sent word for the elders in Ephesus to come to him. Then he gave them a long word recorded in Acts 20.

Fierce Wolves Not Sparing the Flock

Paul said that "fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock" (Acts 20:29). The flock is the church.

The Great Shepherd of the Sheep

Paul said in Hebrews 13:20, "God...brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, in the blood of an eternal covenant." The eternal covenant is the covenant of the new testament to gain a flock, which is the church issuing in the Body and consummating the New Jerusalem. The eternal covenant of God is to consummate the New Jerusalem by the shepherding. God raised up our Lord from the dead to be the great Shepherd to consummate the New Jerusalem according to God's eternal covenant.

**PETER'S IMPRESSION WITH THE LORD'S COMMISSION
TO FEED HIS LAMBS AND SHEPHERD HIS SHEEP**

**Telling the Believers to Return to Christ
as the Shepherd and Overseer of Their Souls**

Peter was so impressed with this commission of the Lord that in his first book he told the believers that they were like sheep being led astray, but they had now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer (Christ) of their souls (1 Pet. 2:25). Christ's shepherding of His flock includes His caring for their outward things and also their inner being, their souls. He takes care of the things concerning their souls by overseeing their souls. Christ indwells us to be our life and everything, but He is also overseeing, observing, the condition and situation of our inner being. He shepherds us by caring for the welfare of our inner being and by exercising His oversight over the condition of our soul, our real person.

Exhorting the Elders to Shepherd the Flock of God

Peter exhorted the elders to shepherd the flock of God among them so that when the Chief Shepherd is manifested, they, the faithful elders, will receive the unfading crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:1-4).

The Heavenly Ministry of Christ Being Mainly to Shepherd the Church of God

Peter's word indicates that the heavenly ministry of Christ is mainly to shepherd the church of God as His flock which issues in His Body.

THE MAIN PURPOSE AND GOAL OF THE APOSTOLIC MINISTRY INCORPORATED WITH CHRIST'S HEAVENLY MINISTRY

The main purpose and goal of the apostolic ministry incorporated with Christ's heavenly ministry are to build up the Body of Christ which will consummate the New Jerusalem for the accomplishment of the eternal economy of God.

THE SHEPHERDING OF GOD'S FLOCK IN SONG OF SONGS

This matter of shepherding God's flock for the main purpose and ultimate consummation of the eternal economy of God is even referred to in Song of Songs. In this book Christ shepherds His seeker and pursuer.

The Lord Pasturing His Flock for Satisfaction and Rest

In Song of Songs 1:7a the seeker says, "Tell me, you whom my soul loves, Where do you pasture your flock [for satisfaction]? / Where do you make it lie down at noon [for rest]?"

Going Forth on the Footsteps of the Flock

The Shepherd responds to the seeker by saying, "Go forth on the footsteps of the flock, / And pasture your young goats / By the shepherds' tents" (1:8b). Under the Lord as the Chief Shepherd there are many other shepherds. The many shepherds pasture their young by their tents, that is, where they live.

Pasturing His Flock among the Lilies

Song of Songs 2:16 says, "My beloved is mine, and I am his; / He pastures his flock among the lilies [the seekers of Christ who live a life of trusting in God with a single heart]." The Lord is pasturing all His seekers as lilies, taking care of them, feeding them, and shepherding them that they may grow.

Shepherding Being Crucial for the Growth in the Divine Life

Song of Songs 6:3 says, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine; / He pastures his flock among the lilies." To shepherd the believers is very crucial for their growth in life.

JOHN 21 BEING AN ADEQUATE AND COMPLETE ENDING

Without John 21, the Gospel of John does not have an adequate and complete ending.

TAKING THE SHEPHERDING WAY TO PREACH THE GOSPEL AND REVIVE THE CHURCH

When I first went to Taiwan, I thought nothing could be worked out there. At that time it was a desolate small island. One day the Lord told me to go along the railway from Taipei to visit the saints. After that visitation I was deeply impressed that Taiwan could be a very

good field for the Lord's recovery. I picked up a burden and decided to begin the ministry there with a conference on August 1, 1949. About four or five hundred Christians from different denominations, who had escaped from mainland China to Taiwan, came on the first day of the conference. I said to them, "We are here to serve one kind of food—Christ. Please be clear about this. If you want anything else, you are wasting your time in coming here." Most of them did not come back. Only the real seekers came.

We took down their names and began to shepherd them. We distributed their names to different brothers and sisters to go and visit them. From the beginning of the work in Taiwan we practiced shepherding. When we had a big gospel meeting, we could get about five to six hundred names. Then we distributed all the names for the proper care. Most people want to have genuine, proper visitors. When we visit people, we should be genuine in our care for them. They will sense that we are not vain people. This shepherding way of preaching the gospel by visiting people warms them up. The church life in Taiwan began with about three or four hundred believers, but after four years we had forty thousand. Most of the people were not saved directly by my ministry; they were saved by the proper shepherding, the proper care. We all have to learn this.

Before I went to Taiwan in 1949, I was in Chefoo. I spoke each Lord's Day, and during the week I and an older brother went to visit the new ones. We were warmly welcomed by every family. They would gather their household together when we came. Within a short time, there was a real revival in Chefoo. The gospel was preached everywhere, not just by myself but by all the saints.

I also made the decision to set up a kitchen in the meeting hall, and I invited groups of twenty or thirty saints to eat together for fellowship. Within a little over half a year, I had invited all the members of the church. At that time there were at least five to six hundred saints in the church in Chefoo. This kind of shepherding stirred up the entire church. I hope the elders would use the hall as a dining room and invite the saints to come for fellowship. An elder should contact at least one person every day for the purpose of shepherding. We should also invite people to our homes for a meal, not inviting the familiar ones but the new ones. The revival in Chefoo occurred because of this kind of shepherding.

Shepherding works. We should not desire to be giant speakers to make a name for ourselves. People may be attracted to come to listen to us, but who will take care of them afterward? The way of having large gospel campaigns does not work. In some places this has been tested out. We may have big gospel meetings with many people, but eventually not many of them are added to the church. Also, we should not use famous or well-known people to testify in our meetings. This will not save people to be added to the church. Even if someone is the president of the country, he should be in the meeting just as anyone else. The way that can save people effectively must be by small vital groups, and everyone in this small vital group must be a shepherd. After a short time, the church will be revived. No other way is more prevailing than this shepherding way.

For the shepherding of the saints, there must be the healthy teaching in the vital groups. In 1 Timothy 3:2 Paul said that an elder should be apt to teach. Teaching here is similar to parents' teaching their children. An elder must be apt to render this kind of home teaching to the members of a local church. Then in 5:17 Paul said, "Let the elders who take the lead well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in word and teaching." *Double honor* refers to material supply for the support of the faithful elders, especially those who labor to teach others.

In the vital groups, we must have something to teach others. We are the prophethood, the prophets speaking for God, and the sonship, the sons of God. Every son must be a speaker.

Today God speaks in the Son (Heb. 1:2), not only the individual Son but the corporate son. As a son of God, we must learn to be a speaker. We can speak of the five great historical events in John 1: creation, incarnation, the Lamb, the Spirit, and the ladder. This will stir up people's interest. When we explain these things, they will be edified.

At another time we can speak of our Lord as the Son of Man, who as the ladder brings heaven to earth and joins earth to heaven. He is the Son of Man who has been lifted up on the cross, just as the bronze serpent was lifted up by Moses (John 3:14). As the Son of Man, He has ascended and is at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56). In Revelation, Christ is trimming all the lampstands as the Son of Man (1:13), and as the Son of Man, He will be sitting on a cloud to reap the harvest of the believers near the end of the great tribulation (14:14). He will return again as the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven (Matt. 26:64). Matthew 25:31 says that He will be the Son of Man sitting on His throne of glory to judge the nations. Eventually, in eternity He will be the Son of Man as the ladder of this universe (John 1:51). If we teach these things, we will stir up people. We have to learn to teach. We have to labor in the Word. If there is no labor, there will be no gain. We lovers and seekers of Christ should learn how to speak as prophets and sons of God.

I hope that we would pray, "Lord, I want to be revived. From today I want to be a shepherd. I want to go to feed people, to shepherd people, and to flock people together." In John 10 and 21 the Lord used three words concerning shepherding: *feed*, *shepherd*, and *flock*. He said, "Feed My lambs," and, "Shepherd My sheep" (21:15-16). He also said, "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must lead them also, and they shall hear My voice, and there shall be one flock, one Shepherd" (10:16). The other sheep are the Gentile believers who would be joined together with the Jewish believers to be one flock. The Lord used the word *flock* here as a noun. I also like to use it as a verb. We should learn to feed, to shepherd, and to flock together. All the churches have to learn how to flock together so that they can be blent together. In the atmosphere of flocking, people are subdued, convinced, nourished, and stirred up by the Lord. All the nearby churches should be flocked together for the saints to be shepherded and stirred up. The elders and co-workers should take the lead to practice this. (*Crystallization-study of the Gospel of John*, pp. 130-137)