

Guidelines for the Exercise of the Lord's day Prophesying Message Five : The Exercise of the Kingdom for the Building Up of the Church

I. Overview:

Matthew 16 reveals the way to build up the church and also reveals the enemy of the building. The gates of Hades, Satan's authority or power of darkness, attack the church to frustrate the Lord from building up the church. In order to build the church, the Lord had to pass through death and enter into resurrection. The building up of the church depends on the shutting up of the gates of Hades through the exercise of three keys. First is to exercise the key of denying the self, which is the soul declaring independence from God. The enemy of the Body is the self; if we can be offended, it is proof that we are full of self. Second, to exercise the key of taking up the cross, which simply means to take up the will of God; to bear the cross is to bear the church and to bear all the saints so that we would have the genuine oneness. Third, to exercise the key of losing the soul-life, if we lose our soul-life in this age, we will find it in the coming age. If we are willing to lose all our present soulish enjoyment for the Lord's sake, for the sake of the church, and for the sake of all the saints, others will be nourished by us and will be built up through us.

II. Truth and Enlightenment:

Day 1 —

A. Expound the "Me" in Matthew 16:24 means a great deal.

This "Me" is the pattern, the pathway; actually it is the crucified and resurrected "Me." The church comes into existence through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. If the Lord had not denied Himself and gone to the cross, He could not have been resurrected, and there would have been no church. We must follow after Him. This means that we must deny ourselves as He did and must allow ourselves to be crucified as He did.

B. How can the church be built up in a practical way? Explain it.

According to biblical terms, the way to build up the church is to be crucified and resurrected. Unless Christ had been crucified and resurrected, He could not build up the church. Through death and resurrection Christ has entered into a realm of transfiguration. The church cannot exist in the natural life or with fleshly people. It can exist only in a realm of transfiguration.

Day 2 —

A. Expound throughout history the church being damaged mainly by the self.

Martin Luther once said that although he was afraid of the pope, he was more afraid of the stronger pope, the self, within his own heart. Nothing damages and frustrates the building up of the church more than the self. Self is the embodiment of the soul, which is expressed through the mind. Behind these three is Satan, who manipulates the self in order to damage the church life.

B. Why should we be no natural affection for the Lord's building in the church life?

For the Lord's building in the church life everything natural must be extracted. There should be no natural affection, relationship, or feeling. Rather, we all must be fearful of natural affection and shun it. Whenever a brother loves me in a naturally affectionate way, I am frightened. I will lock myself and avoid that brother's affection.

Day 3 —

A. Describe the relationship between the self and soul and what should we do?

The self is the soul being independent of God. Whenever we do something by ourselves without depending on God, we are in the self. No matter what we are and no matter what we do, as long as we are independent of God, we are in the self. God created man as a soul to be always dependent on Him. Man is a soul, and as a soul he should depend on God for everything. However, the soul has become the self.

B. Why are we in the self whenever we are independent of brothers and sisters?

Because the self is something independent, the self is the greatest problem to the building up of the Body. We should be dependent not only on God but also on the Body, on the brothers and sisters. Whenever we are independent of the brothers and sisters, we are in the self, in the independent soul. For us today, being independent of the Body is equal to being independent of God. This is a matter of experience.

Day 4 —

A. Explain why there is no excuse for your being offended.

If we were not in ourselves, we could not be offended. If I exercise the key of self-denial to lock up the self, it will be impossible for me to be offended. The reason we are offended is that the self is so open that Satan comes forth to offend us. Although you may be offended by something or someone in the church, do not make any excuses for yourself. This frustrates the building up of the church.

B. Why are blessed those who are not offended?

When the Lord Jesus comes and sets up His judgment seat, He will tell us to settle our account with Him. He may ask us why we were offended in certain places. But if we make excuses for ourselves, the Lord will not accept them. The problem is not the offense, but it is the self. If you can be offended, it is a proof that you are full of self. If my self has been locked up, I will not be offended no matter what you do to me.

Day 5 —

A. Expound the significance of the cross mentioned in the Bible.

The Lord Jesus was not forced to suffer crucifixion; He chose it. This was His own preference. He was not compelled to go to the cross; He was willing to do so because His cross was God's will. Hence, His crucifixion was for the fulfillment of God's will. The Lord was willing to take up the cross and be crucified for the fulfillment of God's purpose.

B. Explain what a difference between as a criminal and a cross-bearer.

Today most Christians are criminals being executed; very few are cross-bearers. If we see that all the environment is God's arrangement, God's will, we shall not be like criminals to be forced to suffer the crucifixion. Rather, I am willing to bear the cross; I am a happy cross-bearer. If we do this, the presence of the Lord will be with us, and we shall enjoy the riches of life.

Day 6 —

A. Why is that if the believers do not lose their soul now, they will lose it when the Lord comes back?

All the amusements that people seek outside of God are for the satisfaction of the soul. When they listen to music or enjoy certain sports, they are happy. But if they do not lose their soul now, then they will lose it when the Lord comes back. The Lord will say to them, "Because you saved your soul so much in the church age, now you must lose it in the kingdom age."

B. What should we do today if we want to have the enjoyment in the coming age?

In the millennium the Lord Jesus will reclaim the earth and enjoy it. By repossessing the earth, the Lord will have enjoyment. Then He will ask His followers, His partners, to enter into His joy. This will be the saving of our soul. In order to have the enjoyment in the coming age, we need to pay the price in this age by losing our soul. We need to say, "Lord, for Your sake I don't want to have so much pleasure or amusement."

III. Conclusion:

Matthew 16 reveals the way to build up the church and also reveals the frustration of the building. Christ, the Son of the living God, builds the church on Himself as the rock, with stones such as Peter, a transformed person. Meanwhile the Lord had to pass through death and enter into resurrection because there were gates of Hades, Satan's authority or power of darkness, to attack the church, frustrating Him from building up the church. Peter, with a good heart, rebuked the Lord and tried to prevent the Lord from going to Jerusalem to be crucified. Actually it was not Peter but Satan who came out through one of the gates of Hades, the gate of Peter's self, to try to frustrate the Lord from building up the church. We can see many spiritual warfares here obviously; though the enemies have gates, we have keys. The gates can not prevail against the keys, whereas the keys will control the gates. Although Satan has many gates full of death, darkness, and negative things, the church will be shutting up of the the gates of Hades through the exercise of three keys: the key of denying the self, the key of taking up the cross, and the key of losing the soul-life.