

THE FOUR GREAT PILLARS IN THE LORD'S RECOVERY

(Saturday—First Morning Session)

Message Seven

The Third Great Pillar—the Church

(2)

The Way to Build Up the Church as the Kingdom of God— Denying the Self, Taking Up the Cross, and Losing the Soul-life

Scripture Reading: Matt. 16:16-28

- I. **In Matthew 16 the way to build up the church as the kingdom of God is revealed; the enemy of the building is also revealed—vv. 16-28:**
 - A. Christ, the Son of the living God, builds the church on Himself as the rock, with stones such as Peter, a transformed person—vv. 16-18.
 - B. The gates of Hades, Satan's authority, or power of darkness, attacks the church to frustrate the Lord from building up the church—v. 18.
 - C. In order to build the church, the Lord had to pass through death and enter into resurrection—v. 21:
 1. The church was produced through Christ's death and resurrection—John 12:24.
 2. The way to build the church is to be crucified and resurrected—cf. 2 Cor. 4:10-12; Gal. 2:20.
 - D. Peter, with a good heart, rebuked the Lord and tried to prevent the Lord from going to Jerusalem to be crucified—Matt. 16:22:
 1. 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—v. 23.
 2. The self, the mind, and the soul-life are the main gates through which Satan comes forth to attack and damage the church—vv. 23-26.
- II. **The building up of the church as the kingdom of God depends on the shutting up of the gates of Hades through the exercise of three keys—vv. 24-26:**
 - A. We need to learn to exercise the key of denying the self—v. 24:
 1. The self is the embodiment of Satan; the self is the soul plus the satanic mind, the mind of Satan—Gen. 3:1-6; Matt. 16:22-23:
 - a. The self is the embodiment of the soul-life, which is expressed through the mind; thus, the self, the soul-life, and the mind are three-in-one.
 - b. Behind these three is Satan, who manipulates the self in order to damage the church—v. 23.
 2. The self is the soul declaring independence from God:
 - a. The Lord does not have regard for what we do; rather, He has regard for our dependence on Him—7:21-23.

- b. The enemy of the Body is the self; because the self is something independent, the self is the greatest problem, the greatest frustration and opposition, to the building up of the Body:
 - (1) We should depend not only on God but also on the Body, on the brothers and sisters—Exo. 17:11-13; Acts 9:25; 2 Cor. 11:33.
 - (2) The Lord and the Body are one; hence, if we are dependent on the Body, we are also dependent on the Lord, and if we are independent of the Body, we are spontaneously independent of the Lord.
 - (3) When we are dependent, the self is gone, and instead of the self, we have the Lord's presence and are full of peace.
- 3. When the self has been utterly dealt with by the cross, we are able to touch the reality of the Body of Christ and come to know the Body.
- 4. We need to deny the following aspects of the self:
 - a. Ambition, pride, and self-exaltation—Matt. 20:20-28; 1 Pet. 5:5; Rom. 12:3; Num. 12:1-10; 16:1-3; Phil. 2:3-4.
 - b. Self-righteousness, self-justification, and exposing, criticizing, and condemning others—Matt. 9:10-13; Luke 18:9-14; 1 Pet. 4:8; John 3:17; 8:11; Luke 6:37; Matt. 7:1-5.
 - c. Introspection and self-despising—S. S. 2:8-9; 1 Cor. 12:15-16.
 - d. Being offended by the church, the leading ones, or the saints—Matt. 6:14-15; 18:21-35; Mark 11:25-26; Col. 3:13.
 - e. Disappointment and discouragement—Rom. 8:28-29; 2 Cor. 4:1.
 - f. Self-love, self-preservation, self-seeking, and self-pity—Matt. 13:5, 20-21.
 - g. Murmurings and reasonings—Exo. 16:1-9; Phil. 2:14.
 - h. Natural affection (friendship) based on natural taste and preference—Matt. 12:46-50; Phil. 2:2b; 1 Cor. 12:25.
 - i. Being opinionated and dissenting—John 11:21, 23-28, 39; Acts 15:35-39; cf. 1 Cor. 7:25, 40.
 - j. Being individualistic and independent—16:12.
- 5. We can deny the self by exercising our spirit to know the indwelling Christ and the power of His resurrection—Phil. 3:10; cf. S. S. 2:8-9, 14.
- B. We need to learn to exercise the key of taking up the cross—Matt. 16:24:
 - 1. To take up the cross simply means to take up the will of God; the cross is God's will—cf. 26:39:
 - a. The Lord Jesus was willing to be crucified so that through His death, His life might be released to produce and build up the church—John 12:24; 2 Cor. 4:12.
 - b. The Lord Jesus was willing to take up the cross and be crucified for the fulfillment of God's will.
 - 2. *Let him...take up his cross* (Matt. 16:24) means that we are not forced to bear the cross but that we willingly take it up.
 - 3. The one church is God's will, and every brother and sister in the church is God's will; thus, to bear the cross is to bear the church and to bear all the saints so that we would have the genuine oneness—John 17:21-23; Eph. 4:3, 13; 1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 2:2.

4. We need to remain on the cross by the power of the resurrected, pneumatic Christ in our spirit, keeping our old man under the termination of the cross day by day—Luke 14:27; Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:10; 1 Cor. 15:31.
- C. We need to learn to exercise the key of losing the soul-life—Matt. 16:25:
1. To save the soul-life is to please the self by allowing the soul to have its enjoyment; to lose the soul-life is to lose the enjoyment of the soul:
 - a. Receiving God into man’s spirit and expressing God through the soul should be man’s joy and amusement—cf. Neh. 8:10; Rom. 14:17.
 - b. The Lord Jesus lost the enjoyment of His soul in this age so that He might find His soul-life in the coming age (John 10:11; Isa. 53:12); we must do the same.
 - c. If we save our soul-life in this age, we will lose it in the coming age, but if we lose our soul-life in this age, we will find it in the coming age—Matt. 16:25.
 - d. We need to love the Lord Jesus and to hate and deny our soul-life, not loving our soul-life even unto death—1 Cor. 16:22; 2:9; Luke 14:26; 9:23; Rev. 12:11.
 2. 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; this is not a suffering but a joy—Heb. 12:2.
 3. The kingdom reward of sharing the King’s joy in ruling over the earth in the manifestation of the kingdom depends upon whether or not we save our soul-life in this age or lose it—Matt. 16:25-28; 25:21, 23.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE CHURCH DAMAGED BY THE SELF

My burden in this message is not interpretation; it is application. Throughout history, the church has not been damaged mainly by Judaism or Gnosticism; it has been 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. Thus the self, the soul, and the mind are three-in-one. Behind these three is Satan, who manipulates the self in order to damage the church life. We all need to heed this word for ourselves.

Simply because of the self, certain saints have left the church life. In 1948 there was a certain brother in Shanghai who was full of self and whose soul was an open gate that no one could lock. He was ambitious to be an elder, and he often complained about the situation in the church. One day he stood up in a meeting to speak many negative things. After his negative speaking, I said, “Brother, there is no need for us to waste our time. If you can find a better place, please tell me about it and I’ll go there with you. But if you cannot find a better place, please be quiet and remain here.” He had nothing more to say. A short while later, he stopped coming to the church meetings, began a meeting in his home, and hired a traveling preacher. With the financial support of this dissenting brother, this preacher wrote a long article opposing Brother Nee. No doubt, this brother damaged the church life. At the same time, he himself lost the church life. This was due to the self. With this brother, there was no

building, for he did not become a Peter, but remained the son of Bar-jona. This was the result of Satan coming out through the self.

THE SERIOUSNESS OF BEING OFFENDED

Let me honestly and lovingly say a word to you all: It is a very serious matter to be offended. Do not casually say, "I have been offended in the church life. The elders and other leading ones have offended me." Although others may offend you, you will always be the first to suffer. On the one hand, I condemn all the offenses; but on the other hand, I must say that 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 and prevailing. Through the open gate of the self, Satan comes forth, and we are offended.

Perhaps in certain matters the church may be wrong. Do not think that the church is no longer the church because it is wrong. For example, when your child makes a mistake, he is still your child. Whether the church is right or wrong, it is still the church. 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.

USING THE KEY OF SELF-DENIAL

As we have seen, Matthew 16 speaks about the building up of the church and also about the gates of Hades and the keys of the kingdom. Without the keys to lock the gates, the church cannot be built. Because there has been so little exercise of these keys, the church has not yet been built. We may talk a great deal about the building. However, when certain things take place to touch us, the self is open. Because we are open to Hades, something from Hades—Satan—comes out. How we need to use the key of self-denial to lock the self! The way to keep from being offended by others is to lock up yourself by denying yourself. Blessed are those who are not offended.

There is no excuse for being 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—it is the self. Certain viruses are very contagious. However, no virus can cause a table to be sick. 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 or how you treat me.

NO NATURAL AFFECTION

I have spoken about being offended. Now I wish to say a word about natural affection. In the church life there should not be any natural friendships. If you regard certain ones as your special friends, it also is an indication that you are full of self. Certain ones match your taste, and you fit their taste. You feed one another's taste. This is very damaging, and it hinders the building. Among the brothers and sisters in the church, there should be a pure divine love, but there should not be any personal affection. If any personal affection creeps into your relationship with the saints, it proves that you are full of self. In the church life there should be no such affection. To me, all the brothers and sisters are the same. To have a favorite among the brothers and sisters is to be full of self. It is not to be a Peter, but a son of Jonah. This damages the building.

We need to receive the mercy of the Lord to regard all the saints as our brothers and sisters, but none as our friends. 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. That is the time for me to exercise the key to deny the self. I will lock myself and avoid that brother's affection. Whenever you discover that you are feeding a brother's self and that he is feeding yours, you must use the key to lock the gate of the self. If you do not lock up the self, Satan will come out through the door of the self. Then you and others will remain sons of Jonah. You will not be Peters, and it will be impossible for the Lord to build the church with you.

THE HIDDEN SELF

More than nineteen hundred years ago, the Lord Jesus prophesied that He would build the church. But why, after so many centuries, do we not yet have the building? It is because the key of self-denial has been neglected. In these messages I have no desire to talk about doctrines. But I do have a heart to fellowship with you all. Oh, the hidden self! Peter had a good heart, but within him there was the hidden self that became the gateway for Satan to come out. I appreciate the Lord's discernment. If I had been the Lord, I would not have had the discernment, but would have appreciated Peter's concern. However, the Lord Jesus immediately discerned that Satan had come out through the gate of the self.

I am glad that in the churches we have the brothers' houses and the sisters' houses. But, through experience, we have realized that there are two kinds of results from living in such a house. Some form natural friendships; others become dissatisfied and disappointed. However, no matter what the situation may be, you should not be disappointed. To be disappointed is a proof that you are in the self. The self of those who live in the brothers' and sisters' houses must be locked up. If the self is locked up, we shall have the building. If you exercise the key of self-denial, others may be offended, but you will not be offended. Instead, you will be built up because the self in you has been locked up. We all need to use the prevailing key of self-denial to lock the self, the soul, and the mind. Otherwise, the building up of the church will be frustrated.

CRUCIFIED AND RESURRECTED FOR THE BUILDING OF THE CHURCH

Matthew 16:24 says, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." The "Me" in this verse means a great deal. This "Me" is the pattern, the pathway. Furthermore, this "Me" is the crucified and resurrected "Me." If we are not crucified and resurrected, there can be no church. The church comes into existence through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. Not only our self, which is defiled, but even the Lord's pure, sinless self had to be denied. 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. Without this, it is impossible for the church to be built up. Whenever we sense that we are feeding the self life of another, we must say, "Lord, I will follow You. I will stop having so much contact with this brother." If you do this, the building of the church will proceed.

KNOWING CHRIST, THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION, AND THE FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERINGS

When you read this word, you may feel that you are not able to fulfill it. No, we cannot do it. This is why we need to pay attention to Paul's word in Philippians 3:10: "To know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death" (Gk.). Here we see that Paul desired to know three things: Christ, the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings. The "Him" in Philippians 3:10 is the "Me"

in Matthew 16:24. We are not able to deny ourselves and go to the cross. But by the power of Christ's resurrection, we can do these things. Furthermore, through His resurrection, we can enter into the fellowship of His sufferings and be conformed to His death. Although in ourselves we cannot do this, we have One living within us who can do it.

WORKING OUT OUR SALVATION

In Philippians 2:12 Paul says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." In the New Testament the word salvation is used in various ways. Regarding our eternal salvation, we cannot work anything out. The Lord Jesus has done everything to accomplish this. But we do need to work out the salvation that enables us to be built up together. For the building of the church, we need to work out this salvation.

The entire book of Philippians is a book on the building. Among the Philippians there was division and the lack of building. Thus, the Apostle Paul wrote this Epistle to help them to be built up. Paul was telling them to work out the building, for this building was their salvation. Many Christians today are missing the building. This indicates that they are not working out their salvation.

Suppose you are living in the brothers' house. When you first moved in, you thought living with the brothers would be wonderful. However, after a short period of time, you found that you could not get along with certain brothers. There is nothing you should do about this. Rather, remain in that brothers' house to be killed. Although you cannot suffer this killing, there is One in you who can. You simply need to follow Him to work out your salvation.

GOD WORKING IN US

Philippians 2:13 tells us how to work out our salvation: "For it is God which worketh in you both the willing and the working for his good pleasure" (Gk.). God is in us doing this work. We simply need to exercise the key of self-denial and say amen to the Lord. We need to exercise the key to lock the self. If we all learn this lesson, we shall be built up together, and we shall become a strong testimony. We shall be able to testify that although we have different characters, dispositions, temperaments, and backgrounds, we can be one and can be built up together. This is precisely what the Lord is dealing with in Matthew 16.

LOCKING UP THE SELF FOR THE BUILDING

Matthew 16 has been veiled for centuries. Perhaps you have read this chapter again and again and again without knowing what the Lord was really saying. But now the Lord has given us further understanding to see how the church can be built up through the exercise of the keys. We need to be afraid of ourselves and use the key to lock up ourselves. We should do this not only in the church life, but also in our family life. If you exercise the key to lock the self, you will have no problems in your marriage. All the problems are from Satan who comes out through the gate of the self. When this gate is locked, Satan is confined, and there are no problems.

In these messages I am not concerned with mere doctrine. Instead, I am presenting to you what I have learned through years of suffering. We need to find out how the church can be built up. If you say that the church is built up through the cross and the resurrection, that is still too doctrinal. We need to go on to learn to exercise the key of self-denial to lock up the self in every situation. Whether a situation is for you or against you, you must lock up the self. Whether the brothers love you and welcome you or hate you and do not welcome you, you still need to lock your self. If you do this, there will be no problems, and it will be possible to have the building of the church. But without the locking up of the self, there is no possibility of having the building. (*The Exercise of the Kingdom for the Building of the Church*, pp. 25-31)