

SERVICE FOR THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH

(Friday—Second Morning Session)

Message Two

Serving with a Vision, according to Revelation, and in the Body for the Building Up of the House of God

Scripture Reading: Acts 9:1-6, 15, 20-22; 22:6-10, 14-15; 26:16, 18-19;
Gal. 1:13-14; Rom. 12:4-5; Eph. 2:21-22

- I. Our service to God must be with a vision and according to revelation—Acts 9:1-6, 15, 20-22; 22:6-10, 14-15; 26:16, 18-19:**
- A. Before the Lord appeared to Paul and a light from heaven shined upon him, his zealous service to God was actually in opposition to God and according to Satan's instigation—9:1; Gal. 1:13-14:
1. It is possible for us to repeat Paul's mistakes, for our service to God can be used as an instrument of Satan to destroy God's move—John 16:2.
 2. Before Paul encountered the great light on the road to Damascus, he had tradition, knowledge of religion, and zeal but no vision or revelation—Gal. 1:13-14.
 3. Paul asked the Lord two questions: the first—"Who are You, Lord?"—relates to knowing the Lord; the second—"What shall I do, Lord?"—relates to receiving the Lord's vision—Acts 22:8, 10.
 4. In Acts 22:10 Paul began to have a vision that cut him off from his previous service and brought him into the New Testament service.
 5. Paul's way of serving God came from a heavenly vision; when he saw this vision, the things of the Old Testament came to an end, and he began to take the New Testament way—26:18-19.
- B. Our service to God may be according to revelation, or it may be natural—Gal. 2:1-2; Eph. 1:17; 3:3, 5:
1. Service according to revelation involves meeting God, being shined on by God, receiving revelation from God, and being burdened in spirit by God—Acts 26:16, 18-19; 22:14-15.
 2. Natural service is according to our own ideas, views, traditions, or regulations; it may also come from imitating others, and it is often initiated simply to meet the need of a certain situation—1 Cor. 2:14.
 3. We should not have outward acts of service to the Lord without inward revelation; our inward revelation must govern our outward acts—Gal. 1:13-14; 2:1-2.
- C. Vision and revelation are the way and the life of service—Acts 26:19; Eph. 3:3, 5, 9:
1. We need a vision for the way of service and a revelation for the life of service; the way to serve God comes from the vision, and the life to serve God comes from revelation.
 2. It was necessary for Paul to change both his outward way and his inner life; his old way was unacceptable, and his old life had to be terminated—Phil. 3:4-8.

3. The way of Paul's preaching came from the heavenly vision, and the content of his preaching came from revelation; his way was heavenly, and his content was the living Christ Himself—Acts 22:14-15; 26:16, 18-19.

II. As believers in Christ, we are members of the Body of Christ, and we serve God in the Body—Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:14-27:

- A. When we come to the matter of serving the Lord, we need to be clear that we need the Body; it is crucial for us to realize that we cannot serve without the Body or have spiritual life outside the Body—Rom. 12:4-5; Phil. 1:19.
- B. The entire Christian living is a living in the Body, and the entire Christian serving is a service carried out in the Body—1 Cor. 12:12-13.
- C. In the New Testament the service is not touched clearly and definitely until Romans 12; it is here that the matter of service is revealed, and it is presented as a matter of the Body and in the Body—vv. 4-11.
- D. With respect to serving in the church, the emphasis is on the setting for service, but with respect to serving in the Body, the emphasis is on the coordination in service.
- E. According to the New Testament, the believers are members one of another and are coordinated in one Body—vv. 4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12, 14; Eph. 5:30:
 1. To know the Body of Christ is to realize that we are only members and that we cannot do anything without others.
 2. A Christian is not a complete entity; he is merely a member of the Body, a part.
 3. When we serve the Lord, we should serve in the position of a member, in coordination with others—1 Cor. 12:18.
- F. If we have seen the Body, we will no longer be divisive, we will not be individualistic or independent, and we will be willing to be blended, without any complaining, murmuring, or criticism but with love, forgiveness, sympathy, forbearance, and long-suffering; it is with such a Body life that there is a real impact in our service—Eph. 1:17-23; 5:23, 30.

III. Our service is for the building up of the house of God—2:21-22; John 2:14-17; 14:2; Hag. 1:2-11:

- A. God wants saved and edified believers to be coordinated and built together as His dwelling place—Eph. 2:21-22:
 1. Leading people to be saved and leading believers to grow in life are merely procedures; God's ultimate goal is the building up of His house.
 2. God's built-up house reveals and expresses God, gives Him the glory He deserves, and accomplishes His will so that He can have rest—John 14:2.
 3. God wants the gospel to be preached fervently, and He also wants the believers to pursue spirituality so that His house, the church, the Body of Christ, may be built up.
- B. We need to care for the building up of God's house—2:14-17; 2 Cor. 11:28:
 1. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, the center of His work was to build a house for God; hence, He was devoured by the zeal of God's house—John 2:17.
 2. The apostles labored for the building up of the house of God—2 Cor. 11:28.

3. Most believers take care of their personal needs and consider themselves to be the center and the starting point—Phil. 2:20-21:
 - a. Concerning both the material realm and the spiritual realm, human beings are selfish and always want to gain something for themselves instead of considering what God desires—Matt. 6:8-13, 19-34.
 - b. If we want to be Christians who match God’s desire and meet His need in this age, we cannot be trapped in ourselves; we must come out of ourselves to care for God’s need—Hag. 1:2-11:
 - (1) God desires that we come out of ourselves and be delivered from our selfishness in order to care for the building up of His house—Phil. 2:21; Hag. 1:2-11.
 - (2) Instead of focusing on ourselves, we must care for the house of God.
4. We must not focus on anything other than the work of God to build His house—Eph. 2:21-22.
5. We serve God with a vision, according to revelation, and in the Body for the building up of the church as the house of God—John 14:2; 1 Tim. 3:15.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

**VISION AND REVELATION
BEING THE WAY AND THE LIFE OF SERVICE**

We need a vision for the way of our service and a revelation for the life of our service. Saul’s way of serving God was not sinful, but it was a way that was according to the Old Testament, Judaism, and the law. When the heavenly light flashed around him, he knew that he could no longer take his old way. His old practices had to be abandoned, and he turned completely in his way of serving God. He did not pursue his former course; rather, he stopped. Nevertheless, it was not enough for him to change his outward way; his inner life also needed to change. His old way was unacceptable, and his old life had to be terminated.

Many in Christianity focus on the light that flashed around Paul on his way to Damascus, but few focus on the light of life that he received. Many speak of Paul’s not being disobedient to the heavenly vision, but they miss his word in Galatians 1:16 concerning God revealing His Son in him. Working for the Lord involves more than an outward way or practice; it involves the matter of an inner life as well.

For example, some argue whether baptism should be by immersion or by sprinkling. I often tell people that baptism is not merely a practice; it is a matter that speaks of knowing the Lord inwardly in His death and resurrection. It is pointless if we merely make a change in an outward practice, but our inner life remains unchanged. If we change the broth but not the medicine in the broth, there will be no impact on the person who is sick. There is no value in changing outward things if there is no inward change. We need vision for our outward way and revelation for our inner life. Our way must be heavenly, whereas our life must be Christ.

A friend in the Lord once asked me, “Why does your church not take interest in social issues? It is as if you are floating in the air above the earth.” I replied, “I am a servant of God in order to speak for God; how can I take an interest in social issues?”

How can I be involved with earthly matters?" A heavenly vision always makes people heavenly. The church is heavenly, and it should not be defiled by earthly things. Social customs and worldly practices are earthly, human matters; they are not matters related to the church. Although the church walks on the earth, she is not earthly; she walks a heavenly way on earth. The life of the church is also heavenly; it is Christ Himself. The church has a heavenly way and the life of Christ.

We must have vision and revelation in order to serve God. The way to serve God comes from the vision, and the life to serve God comes from revelation. Nothing human should be brought into the service to God, that is, nothing from our past, nothing that is Chinese, nothing that is foreign, nothing that is old, and even nothing that is new. No religious system, no person, no human method, no social practice, and no personal ideas are allowed in the service to the Lord. In his service as Saul, Paul brought the things from the Old Testament into his service, the things given by God to his fathers. From a human perspective, there is nothing better than the things that Saul brought into his service. We can bring in things that are Socratic or Confucian in nature, but these things cannot compare to the things of the Old Testament, Judaism, and the law, things that God wanted Saul to abandon. If God did not want these things, how could He have any regard for things that are merely social, worldly, and human? Simply because something reflects a current trend does not mean that it should be brought into the service of the church. The heavenly vision stops the earthly practices and methods of God's serving ones. The heavenly vision adjusts us.

In contrast, revelation causes us to know Christ inwardly. Men such as Socrates, Confucius, Mencius, and even Bertrand Russell have spoken many words. However, we do not preach the words of men; we preach Christ Himself. Christ is the Word. John 1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh" (vv. 1, 14). The Word in these verses is not objective but subjective. We are not preaching dead letters, dead teachings, dead creeds, or dead doctrines. We are preaching the living Jesus, the living Christ, that is, the Lord Himself. Our speaking cannot be understood by mere mental exercise or outward Bible reading; rather, God must reveal His Son in us so that we may know the Son of God who is our life. This was the content of Paul's preaching. The way of his preaching came from a heavenly vision, and the content of his preaching came from revelation. His way was heavenly, and his content was the living Christ Himself.

Some Christian groups show films at their gospel meetings to boost their low attendance, and they advertise in order to increase the number of attendees. Then they show the film after the message so that attendees have to listen to the message first. This often causes the attendees to murmur about being forced to listen to a message. Some even leave before the film starts. When the film is finally shown, the content of the message is forgotten. When I speak to the brothers about this, I ask, "Why do they do this?" Certainly this practice does not come from a heavenly vision. We should preach the living Lord Himself, and our way of preaching should be heavenly and spiritual. Even if other Christian groups take the worldly way of using films to appeal to people, we should not adopt this practice.

Recently, the brothers and sisters have formed gospel teams and are going out with bass drums to preach the gospel enthusiastically. Nevertheless, within me there is a question: “Is this sounding of bass drums according to a heavenly vision? Can it withstand the shining of the heavenly vision? Is the practice of gathering people through the sounding of a bass drum heavenly or earthly? Is there a heavenly power that is unsettling people and inclining them to hear the gospel, or are we merely summoning a crowd with drums?” Some brothers say, “Drumming is right; on the day of Pentecost men were gathered by a sound out of heaven as in Acts 2:2.” Yes, they were gathered by sounds, but where did the sound originate from—heaven or earth?

This does not mean that we must never use drums; I am even responsible for starting gospel teams in 1948 in Shanghai and Nanking. Strictly speaking, the only question that matters is whether our way has a heavenly source. I am not against the going out of gospel teams, but we must see a vision and have a revelation in our service. We cannot bring worldly ways, human methods, social practices, or even ancient or modern ways into the service. We must not bring any human ways into the service.

It is not enough to have an outward way; we must also have life inwardly. God wants us to preach outwardly according to His inner life. God does not need us to preach the doctrine of baptism but to preach the reality of baptism, which is the crucified and resurrected Christ who is our life. With a heavenly vision the way to serve God will be clear, and with revelation the content of our service will be proper.

NEEDING A VISION TO SERVE THE LORD

All God’s serving ones must have a vision. From the Old Testament to the New Testament, every serving one of God had a vision. Abel offered sheep based on vision and revelation. Cain’s offering of the fruit of the ground, however, was not according to vision or revelation. Many Bible readers feel that God was unfair to Cain. Both brothers brought an offering, but God had regard only for Abel’s offering, not for Cain’s offering (Gen. 4:3-6). When I first read this account, I felt that way, but gradually I realized that Abel offered sheep according to a vision, whereas Cain offered something out of himself. Abel’s offering was based on a vision; God showed him the way, and he made an offering according to God’s way. Thus, his offering was accepted by God (3:21; Heb. 11:4). Cain followed his own way with no regard for God’s heart. Thus, God could not accept his offering. This can be likened to a servant doing something with no regard for his master’s instructions. No master would hire such a servant.

Noah built the ark because he received a vision from God, not because he had a personal dream. In regard to the ark, he did according to all that God commanded him (Gen. 6:13-22). Similarly, Abraham’s decision to leave Ur of the Chaldeans was not initiated by a personal decision but by a vision that he received from God (12:1-4).

The children of Israel were brought out of Egypt by Moses because he was sent by God, who said to him, “I will send you to Pharaoh, that you may bring My people,

the children of Israel, out of Egypt” (Exo. 3:10). Later, God established the passover and, through Moses, instructed the children of Israel to prepare the lamb, to put its blood on the doorposts and lintel, and to eat the flesh of the lamb and the unleavened bread with their loins girded, sandals on their feet, and a staff in their hand (12:1-14) so that they could go out from the Egyptians (11:1-8; 14:1-31). All this was according to a vision that God gave to Moses. God commanded him, and he brought the children of Israel out according to God’s command. After bringing the children of Israel into the wilderness, Moses did not presume to set up the tabernacle, altar, Ark, and golden lampstand according to his own pattern. Rather, he received revelation from God during the forty days that he was in God’s presence. Moses built according to this heavenly pattern, and he set up the priesthood according to God’s instruction (24:12, 17-18; 25:1—31:11; 35:1—40:38). This involved service with revelation.

When Joshua succeeded Moses, God said to him, “Arise, and cross over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land which I am giving to them, to the children of Israel...Be strong and take courage, for you will cause this people to inherit the land which I swore to their fathers to give to them” (Josh. 1:2, 6). When God revealed, Joshua acted. Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel also were prophets with vision. No prophet served God without vision and revelation.

This was the situation in the Old Testament, but even more it was the situation in the New Testament. The Gospels record the Lord Jesus leading His disciples for three and a half years, giving them vision and revelation so that they would receive heavenly sight. When the Lord died and resurrected, the Spirit of reality guided the disciples further into all the reality (John 16:13). The Epistles of Paul are full of vision and revelation (2 Cor. 12:1; Eph. 3:3-5). This is especially true of Revelation, the last book of the New Testament, which was written by the apostle John. *Revelation* in Greek means “an unveiling of a mystery that has been hidden.” The Lord showed John great revelations through many visions and signs, which became the content of the book of Revelation. Hence, the New Testament, from the Gospels to Revelation, is full of visions and revelations that God gave to man. We must have vision and revelation in order to serve God today. (*The Vision, Ministry, and Leading of the Lord’s Serving Ones*, pp. 10-15)