

Bethany – A Miniature of the Church Life

Fellowship from Minoru Chen on October 17, 2021

Amen, saints. It is good to see you again. I must say, I'm not very well prepared. But on the other hand, the burden is there within and deep. I just wish there would be a way that what is spoken here can get to the other saints in your locality. I don't know how that can be done. These things have been recorded from day one. I think it's housed on the GTCA website. It's there and it's accessible. But anyway, maybe you can consider how to pass on or spread this fellowship with the other saints in your locality. Since I don't have any particular line of content, I think I will go back to my fellowship with the church in St. Louis these last two days. Saints from there and whoever took part in that Zoom mini conference, please forgive me for repeating. I learned from Brother Lee to repeat.

Our Need for a Genuine Breakthrough

Brothers and sisters, it's not a matter of listening to me fellowship about this and that. It's about our need for a breakthrough; a genuine, real breakthrough in the way we practice the Lord's testimony, that is, the church life. What we are doing, what we are carrying on, and how we are carrying on, although with faithfulness and even with steadfastness, for which we thank the Lord and that is very important, still falls short of meeting the Lord's need today.

Talking about rockets, the rocket was first produced in China. China was the first country years ago to use rocket technology. But what kind of rocket was that? Just some small little thing with some dynamite in it. It didn't go very far or very high. It really did not require that much power or energy to release that kind of rocket. Even the

famous Nazi Germany V-2 rocket that they used to bomb London, England in the beginning of World War II, those traveled quite a distance. But really, they are like child's play compared to what we see today. And it doesn't take that much. They're not that accurate, although they surely caused destruction. But today, we are here to send people to Mars, not just to the moon, but to Mars. And so, the kind of rocket, the kind of power that is needed to take such a capsule or such a spacecraft to the right orbit height, and the thrust and the burn that is needed, the kind of power that is needed to lift these things I don't know how many millions and millions of times more than those so called "early rockets." What I am saying is that to live out and to work out the testimony of Jesus and to fulfill our commission on earth today requires so much more power. Let us consider that now is a time which is closer to the Lord's return, the coming kingdom, the next age and the situation is one of darkness and lawlessness in the world today. This means that this darkness of night is before the dawn and is usually the darkest time when the enemy, the evil forces of darkness, are working overtime to destroy and do its thing. There is a great push back of the enemy, a resistance that we face, and a challenge to us really living as the children of light. Our challenge should really be that the light we have would not be hidden under the table but would be seen as a city that is on a hill.

More Power Needed in this Age

Today in our age it's much more difficult to meet the need at this hour. Don't think that some common power will do or even some power that we may have experienced before will do. We need more power, we need a greater power, we need more strength, we need more endurance. We need, in aerodynamic terms, more lift and thrust, which really translates into much more energy in order to carry out what we should be carrying out today. It's easy for us to be lulled or lullabied to a kind of a befuddled or stupefied condition to think "Well, everything is okay. We have the truth, we're still in the recovery. We're still churching, we're still going to the meetings. Oh, that's good. And praise the Lord." Well, maybe for you and I that's good enough.

But the question is, are we today really fulfilling the Lord's intention? Have we really accomplished all that the Lord wants us to accomplish? Have we really recovered all the things that He wants us to recover? Do we have assurance of that? I don't brothers and sisters. And this is not to be negative or critical or even just to be kind of disappointed. Every day, I can testify to you that I live under this heavy weight and burden within. When, brothers, is the recovery going to do that? This is not the time just to have a good church life or a happy church life. There's nothing wrong with that. The church life should be happy, it should be good, and should be sweet. No doubt about that. I'm for that. But I'm talking about God's need. I'm talking about the Lord's need. I'm talking about His interest. That that's what I'm concerned about.

Little Bethany in Contrast with Great Jerusalem

So anyway, this weekend in two short meetings, in a very instant way the Lord led us to cover the picture or the miniature or the model, if you will, of the church life as seen in Bethany. Now Bethany is not a household. Bethany is a village in Judea a couple of miles away from that great religious center called Jerusalem. It's an unknown place, it's a low-class place, it's not a place you would go to visit. People don't go to Bethany; they go to Jerusalem to hold the feasts. They go to Jerusalem to worship. They make pilgrimages, if you will, to that great religious center of Judaism, with its temple, with its holy law from Moses, with its claim to have holy angels, and with its holy ceremonies. All of that great religion is in Jerusalem. One of the greatest religions ever on the earth, Judaism, that's where they go to see it. No one would come to little Bethany. I wonder if there were just a few hundred people in that village. But that village, Bethany, you read in the New Testament, in the Gospels and Acts, especially Luke and Acts, written by the same author, you'll find that Bethany is located at the southeastern foothills of Mount Olivet, or Mount Olive. The Mount Olive, which is right next door, nearby to that little village, is where the Lord ascended to the heavens. And it is the same Mount Olive that the Lord through the angels told some that this is where He

will come back. That's Bethany, that's where it is. He's not coming back to Jerusalem. He's coming back to Bethany, to Mount Olivet. And today, it is a quite a picture here. We are faced no longer with Judaism, but today we're faced with Christianity, or Christendom, both the Roman Catholic branch and also the Protestant branch beginning from the Reformation in the 16th century. These two are forms of Christendom, and this, like Judaism, is the grand religion. Today there are three branches of real religion that worship the real God. One is Judaism, the second is Islam, and the third is Christianity. The Roman Catholic Church is still here, the Protestant church is here, the denominations are still here, the state churches are still here. And so many offshoots and divisions and sects related to that, are all here.

Christ Versus Religion

The Roman Catholic Church is called the harlot in Revelation, the spiritual Babylon. That woman, that prostitute, has a gilded cup of gold but inside are all the abominations of spiritual fornication. She is riding on the beast, fully joined with the world governments and particularly the beast itself, the Antichrist. She has many daughters who are simply today's Protestant places. Now, we're not talking about the people, we're never talking about people. We're talking about the system. We're talking about the religious organizations fully in their utmost degraded form. What was a little mustard seed has become a huge tree where evil birds lodge. What was fine flour as food to God and man is now infused with leaven, becoming some big loaves, easy to take in. This is the Lord's prophecy in Matthew 13. What we're talking about here brothers and sisters is not something we made up. It's in the pure Word of God.

Bethany – A Place of Rest and Satisfaction

What are we? Who are we? What are we doing here on the earth? To use the picture of Bethany, today we are here to be a little Bethany, two miles from Jerusalem. The Lord Jesus, in that last week that He spent in Jerusalem, preceding His betrayal, arrest, prosecution, and eventually crucifixion, He had to be there to subject Himself to the

examination of all those religious people. He did this. In a good sense, He was not there to do the things He had done before in His earthly ministry. He was there being examined, tested, and approved as an unblemished lamb ready for slaughter.

He was in Jerusalem during the day, but at night He left because to Him Jerusalem was not a city of joy. He found no rest, satisfaction, or comfort there. It's a transmuted religion, where even God Himself in Christ would not be. He left, God had long left, and Christ would not be there. Where did he go? He went to that little village with a very small band of people. He had His disciples, the first apostles, and then some who were drawn by Him. People who recognized Him as the real Messiah, as the Son of the living God, as the Christ, as the chosen One and the promised One of God to Israel and to the world. They were there as His followers, and more than that, as His lovers. They just loved Him and followed Him. At night, He would eat there, He would feast there, and He would lodge there. That was His comfort. That was His satisfaction, found in a very tiny, no name place.

A House of Affliction and Feasting

Brothers and sisters, do you realize that today the Lord's recovery is Bethany, or should be Bethany? The word Bethany means a house of affliction. Some also believe that it means a house of figs. I would like to think it's both. Outwardly, it's for sure a house of affliction because Christ is there, and He was the most sought-after criminal. The Pharisees and all the religious people went after Him to kill Him. Even one among His followers, called Judas Iscariot, was ready to betray Him for thirty pieces of silver. He was persecuted and so all His followers were likewise persecuted. Bethany is a place of affliction outwardly, but inwardly it's a house of figs. Figs always refer to the blossoming riches of life, and the resurrection life that satisfies, that fills the hunger, that brings enjoyment. Inwardly, it's a house of feasting. Outwardly, it's a house of suffering. Brothers and sisters, doesn't that describe the church life? You know, somewhat like the tabernacle, where you have the most outward covering made of

porpoise skin, which as I recall is a very ugly piece of skin. When you look from afar, you only see the skin, and you think, what kind of place is this? So ugly, so coarse. But inside, brothers, is the holiest of all where God dwells. That's the church. That's Bethany. That miniature of a church life, that depiction, that portrayal of the features that the church of Christ should possess. There it is. Brothers and sisters, we're not a big people. We have no names, we're not that strong, we're certainly not great folks. We're just the low class, so to speak. Our number is not great; in fact, it's rather small. And we are hardly known to exist. But He is here. Jesus is here, the Savior, the Lord, Christ is here.

A Place with the Lord's Presence

I remember the account of the first Lord's table of the Lord's recovery in 1921 or 1922, 100 years ago. Three people, a couple whose last name is Wang, and Watchman Nee, who were all students in a school and saw the light in the Word of God that the denominations were wrong. All the different names are wrong, and that the practice of Christianity is a deviation from the truth. They wanted to return to the Bible. They didn't have the word recovery yet, but they just wanted to go back to the Bible and practice the truth. One evening they were there, having just canceled their names from the book of life in their denomination. They signed out, they took their name off, they said "those are not the books of life, those are just a membership log of some religious organization." That night they broke bread. Many years later Watchman Nee recalled how stale that loaf of bread was, and how sour that wine had become. Do you remember that? But he also remembered how close heaven was to the earth. In other words, the Lord's presence was with three people. How big was China? Well, you may say, the Lord guarantees that when two or three are gathered into His name, He will be in that mix. I won't argue with you. But what was depicted, what was recalled was more than that. Even the Lord's presence has degrees. Don't think that I say I have the Lord's presence, and that's it, as if this is something absolute. There are degrees. The Lord said in John 14, if anyone would love Me and keep My

commandments, I and My Father will come to them and manifest Ourselves to them. That is a special kind of presence, or manifestation. In the Lord's recovery, for years many could testify that when we came, it was not the porpoise skin that attracted us, it was not the meeting hall that attracted us, it was the presence of Christ, the undeniable presence of the Lord in a group of people, or with a group of people that drew us. That's Bethany, it's a place with the Lord's presence. And little Bethany stood in contrast to great Jerusalem. There was the presence of Christ, the undeniable presence of the Lord with a group of people, that drew us. That's Bethany. It's a place with the Lord's presence. That little Bethany stood in contrast to great Jerusalem.

A Living Place in Resurrection

Now, what I share with the saints these last two days, was very simple, you may say, but it's very much in line with the present burden. I did my best to bring out three particular features of that miniature depiction of a church life. It would be signified by three people, that sibling group comprised of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. Brother Lee wrote of this in his footnotes in John 11 and 12, where we have this coverage of that story of Lazarus, being raised from the dead by the Lord and also of Mary's pouring out her perfumes to wash the Lord's feet. In these two chapters you see two of the main features of the church life there.

The first one is signified by Lazarus and his experience of being raised from the dead. Now I'm not going to get into the story because we all know that story, but the point is this, that the first, most important feature of the church is that it is an entity in resurrection. The church is something that has overcome death, that has defied death, and that has come out of death. Christ is the Firstborn from the dead, and the church is actually the many begotten from the dead, following Christ. The church is built from that bone that is taken out of the side of Adam and made into a woman, Eve, as the counterpart of Christ, signified by the resurrection, unbroken rib. This is the resurrection life through

which the church was produced. When Christ was resurrected, we were resurrected with Him 2000 years ago. And of course, one day in time, we were regenerated, making that resurrection fact our experience. In any event, millions and millions, who knows how many, were resurrected, and together, only these people can be part of the church.

Anything that has not been through death is still part of the old creation. Only the new creation is the church. Only those who have overcome death belong in the church. That's why we say the only way into the church life is through the cross, because the cross terminates everything, old, everything natural, everything of the flesh, everything of the world, and everything that is not Christ, not God. It filters them out. Only what can pass through death and come out of it on the other side, can be called the church. That's what Lazarus signifies.

Today, to be the testimony of Jesus, to be the proper church of the Lord, especially in the recovery, the signs that we are really the real church is resurrection life. Now what is resurrection life as opposed to just the divine life? The divine life is eternal, of course with no beginning or end, it is the life of God. Resurrection life speaks of something further. It is that life that has passed through death and emerged out of death. That's resurrection. For that, power is needed. Paul says the power of his resurrection is a death-defeating power. It's a death-overcoming power. Paul, when he was disputing or discoursing on the truth of resurrection, said, "Death, where is your sting? Grave where is your sting?" We are more than victors and conquerors in Christ, in resurrection. So, no death is allowed here. No death can be here, if we are the church.

The first thing, brothers and sisters, to have the church life is that we must live in this resurrection life. We must take the resurrection and the life, which are Christ Himself, as our Person and everything. We must be filled with the life-giving Spirit, the Spirit of life. Actually, the Spirit is the reality of resurrection. If we don't do that, we could be

just playing a game of church and not being the church in reality. Don't think this cannot happen with us in the recovery. Absolutely, it can.

Brothers, the first enemy and the last enemy is called Death, and as far as God is concerned, death defiles more than sin. You are unclean if you touch some carcass of some animals in Leviticus. You have to wash yourself and cleanse yourself. Death is very dirty in the eyes of God. In the vow of the Nazarites, even if your relative dies, you couldn't go touch it or take care of it because it defiles you and disqualifies you from being a Nazarite. God hates death. Brothers and sisters, what do we need today to practice the church life? It is very simple. We need life, resurrection, and the Spirit in all of its riches and power.

Lazarus didn't say a word. There is no record of him saying a single word. In a way, he didn't have to. He just came out of the grave four days after he died, and that's a very loud speaking. No one can deny it. A great number of Jews believed because he lived. Jesus was demonstratively resurrection, standing there. What do all the churches need? What do the GTCA churches need today more than anything? This resurrection life in action, the power of this life in action. I tell you, this testimony convinces, and this testimony subdues. This testimony draws. A lot of saints have testified that when they first came to the church life earlier on. It's not that the meeting hall is so beautiful. It's not that the people are pretty. There is something here. There's life here. There's resurrection here. It's living here. This is the land of the living.

I feel I'm preaching here, but I don't know. I'm just burdened, dear saints. We can have a lot of truth, a lot of knowledge, and a lot of good doctrines, but we may not be living. We may not be in the reality of this resurrection. Our life, our meetings, could be in a deadened condition. We may be here just doing something routine and common. I'm surely not here to criticize and to discourage us, but I must say and talk this way.

It is no wonder that Brother Lee said we need to condemn the death of Sardis who have a name that it is living but is really dead. They need to have a change of garment because their garments has been spotted or tainted by death. We need to hate death, brothers and sisters. We need to hate any kind of deadness. We must be living, vital, full of resurrection life. Again, that is the Spirit. That really means, brothers and sisters, we need to live a life being filled with the Holy Spirit. Filled with the Spirit, to be alive, just filled with the Spirit within and without. That's the church life. I tell you, if we are filled with the Spirit, the gospel will go out, the testimony will be seen, and people will be drawn. People may be attracted by the truth, but they need to see a picture, a reality, of those truths.

A Place of Absoluteness

The second feature of the church life is depicted or signified by Mary, who in the house of Simon the leper. She broke the valuable container and anointed the Lord with the perfume, the spikenard. And it says, "the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment." (John 12:3) What is this next sign of a church of the Lord? It is the sign of Mary, who poured out everything. You all know that in that feast, Judas Iscariot was also there, and he said, *what a waste! This thing she poured out could have been sold for three hundred denari*. Now one denarius is one day's good pay. So, that's about a year's pay. And this woman, Mary thought nothing of it, she just broke it and pour it all on the Lord's feet. She had zero commercial sense. She didn't even think how much the thing was worth, she didn't think of the value in money terms. In her mind, there's no money here. It's not about money. In other words, her pouring out her consecration, her response of love to the Lord, was free of reservation, free of consideration. It was free of calculation. She just poured out. She thought, *this is the One, this is the Son of God. He deserves everything. He deserves my whole life, my future, my livelihood, my job, my marriage, my family, to be poured out*.

This is the impact of the church life. It's called absoluteness. When

there is a group of people who love the Lord and are absolutely given to the Lord, poured out in this way, I can tell you the impact. The Lord says, wherever the gospel is preached, let this story be told. The power of the gospel is not only in what we preach as the truth of the word. The power of the gospel is our full surrender, our abandonment of everything. It's our pouring out of everything on the Lord. That's the power of the gospel—the absoluteness. Oh, that this may be recovered among us, to be seen and felt among us.

We should be such, filled with the Spirit and with the resurrection life. We should be those giving up everything for the Lord, not just in word only, but really pouring out everything. The Lord said, leave her alone. Don't bother her. Let her do it. Obviously, the Lord was receiving and enjoying what she was doing. He said, do you know what she's doing? What she's doing is for my burial.

Now the Lord had not been crucified yet, the Lord had not been buried yet. That was days after, but this woman didn't know whether she would have the chance to anoint the Lord at His burial. And it turned out that way. Some of the women who loved the Lord and followed the Lord brought spices and wanted to anoint the Lord for His burial. And that was not to be. They tried again on the resurrection morning to bring spices to anoint the Lord if they could find Him. And the Lord had already resurrected, and that was not to be.

And so Mary, this single woman, this sister, seized the moment and did something for the Lord's burial. All I can say, dear brothers and sisters, is that there's something called *timing* here. The day will come, the Lord will return, and every knee will bow, every tongue will confess. Those five foolish virgins who didn't get filled with the oil, asked the prudent virgins, “please give us some of your oil.” But they said, *No, you buy it yourself; you have to go buy it.* And we know what that means. That means they could not enter into the wedding feast. And they had to use that period of time to still pay the price to get the oil. There's a timeliness to paying the price. Brothers and sisters, today

is the day for us to pay the price. Not that day, I hope. Today is the day to pour out on the Lord, not for His burial but for His return. This kind of absoluteness is powerful and convincing, and that's Mary. There's a lot to be said about this, but I'll just say this much.

A Place of Burning Service

The last is Martha. I've told the saints, Martha was quite unfairly regarded because the Lord told her you, "You're too busy here. You have to be like your sister to sit at my feet and hear My speaking." That is true. The Lord did say that Mary chose the better part. But Martha was serving. Now I would like to say that in the church life, this should be another distinctive feature where everyone serves the Lord. Everyone is a Martha. Actually, we all should have this composite name: Lazarus-Mary-Martha. That should be all our names. In our church life, it should not be just a few serving; just the leading brothers or responsible ones or serving or coordinating ones. No! We've all been given a gift. We've all been measured a measure of faith. We all have been given an allotted portion of grace by the Head. All of this is not just for us to hold on to, to put in a handkerchief and bury in the soil, in the earth, as that one talented slave did. But it's for us to use and invest towards the Lord's interest. In Romans, it says, "Do not be slothful in zeal, but be burning in spirit, serving the Lord." (Romans 12:11)

This third signature of the normal church is that it is zealous; it is burning. It is not cold. And especially it's not lukewarm. Instead, all the saints are zealous, stepping up, active, busy serving the Lord in many different ways. Not one is idle. Not one is doing nothing. Everyone is a little Martha, serving. You know, if Martha didn't cook, the Lord would have nothing to eat. So let us not be too harsh on Martha. But the picture is this, until every saint, every part of the Body operates, the Body cannot build itself up in love. This is the spirit of the God-ordained way, that every saint is active, that every saint functions. Only then will the Body be built up.

Conclusion

So I leave you with these thoughts today. This picture of Bethany gives us these very key features, or conditions, of what a church should be like: living, absolute, and burning towards our Lord Jesus. I believe the Lord will do this work. I am here to incite you to become such. My, if in these GTCA churches, all the saints would be like this, how impactful this would be? How high the morale, how bright the Lord's testimony will be in all these different localities! I just stop here. I think that's good enough. If you can perceive, brothers and sisters, my burden is the same—a very heavy burden. But I also see that the Lord is using these GTCA occasions as an opportunity for so many churches and saints to rise up in these days, to live like this. And don't think for a moment this is not possible. This is more than possible. We just need to rise up.