

**THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, THE CHURCH LIFE,  
THE CONSUMMATION OF THE AGE, AND THE COMING OF THE LORD**

Message One

**Watching and Being Ready in Order to Be Prepared  
by the Lord for His Second and Imminent Coming**

Scripture Reading: Matt. 24:1-3, 32-44; 25:1-13

- I. The Greek word for *coming* (*parousia*) means “presence”; Christ’s coming will be His presence with His people; His parousia will begin with the rapture of the man-child (Rev. 12:5) and of the firstfruits (14:1-4) before the great tribulation and will end with His appearing on the earth with the saints at the end of the great tribulation (Matt. 24:27, 30; 2 Thes. 2:8; Jude 14).**
- II. We need to see the signs of the Lord’s second and imminent coming—Matt. 24:1-3:**
- A. The greatest sign of the end of this age (when the last three and a half years of the great tribulation are about to begin) is the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom to the whole inhabited earth—v. 14; Rev. 6:2.
  - B. Another great sign of the Lord’s coming is when Israel, represented by the fig tree, was miraculously restored as a nation; to the believers this fig tree is a sign of the end of this age—Matt. 24:32-35; Jer. 24:2, 5, 8.
  - C. Before the day of the Lord’s second coming, the apostasy will come, and the man of lawlessness, Antichrist, will be revealed—2 Thes. 2:3, 7:
    - 1. Sin is lawlessness, which is the living of a life outside of and not under the principle of God’s ruling over man—1 John 3:4.
    - 2. The mystery of lawlessness is working today among the nations and in human society until Antichrist as the man of lawlessness is revealed; because the perishing ones do not receive the love of the truth, God sends to them an operation of error, an active power of misleading, that they might believe the lie—2 Thes. 2:11.
    - 3. Thus, we can see that Isaiah 5:20 is fulfilled with the ones who believe the lie—  
“Woe to those who call evil good, / And good evil; / Who put darkness for light, / And light for darkness; / Who put bitter for sweet, / And sweet for bitter!”
  - D. When the great tribulation, the last three and a half years of this age, is about to begin, Antichrist will set up an abominable idol of desolation, an image of himself, in the temple and make people worship both it and him (Matt. 24:15; Dan. 9:27; Rev. 13:14; 14:9, 11); this shows that the temple of God will be rebuilt before the Lord comes back (2 Thes. 2:4).
  - E. The conditions of evil living that stupefied the generation of Noah before the flood portray the perilous condition of man’s living before the Lord’s coming and the great tribulation—Matt. 24:3, 21, 27, 37, 39; Luke 17:26-27; 21:34-36.
  - F. A sign of the Lord’s second coming is a lack of faith among many of His believers—  
“When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”—18:8.
  - G. Another sign of the Lord’s second coming is that “because lawlessness will be multiplied, the love of the many will grow cold”—Matt. 24:12; Rev. 2:4.
  - H. A sign of the end times and of the Lord’s second coming is the over-accumulation of wealth—“You have stored up treasure in the last days”—James 5:3:

1. In the last days before the Lord's coming, men will accumulate wealth in an unprecedented way and will thus be unaware of their coming miseries and their miserable destiny of God's judgment—Matt. 16:27.
2. In the last days there will be a multiplication of material enjoyment and lustful indulgence with unprecedented hedonism—James 5:1-6; cf. Zech. 5:5-11.

**III. To be taken by the Lord, we need to be those who are watchful for His imminent coming and prepared and ready to be His bride (Matt. 24:32-44; Rev. 19:7) so that we may be raptured before the great tribulation (3:10; Luke 21:36):**

- A. The meaning of rapture is to be taken into the Lord's presence; if we would be taken into the Lord's presence, we must be in His presence today—2 Cor. 2:10; Psa. 16:11; 27:8; 43:4; Acts 3:19-20; Exo. 33:14-16; cf. Gen. 4:16.
- B. In order to be those who love the Lord's appearing, His coming back, we must treasure His appearing, His manifestation, to us today—2 Tim. 4:8; Acts 26:16; John 14:21.
- C. The one who is taken is mature in life, and the other is not; to become mature is a life-long matter; for the Lord's coming, we need to prepare ourselves by loving Him to the uttermost and by growing up into Him in all things so that, at His appearing, we may be matured to be raptured—Heb. 6:1; John 21:15-17; Eph. 4:15; cf. Gen. 5:22-24.
- D. Being ready to be raptured is a matter of being filled with Christ to the uttermost by praying that we may grow and mature in life—Eph. 3:16-17a; *Hymns*, #395.
- E. The meaning of being watchful is to be careful, not careless, every day on the alert against the possibility of stumbling; those who watch must be those who do not trust in themselves and are not self-confident—Jer. 17:7-8; 2 Cor. 1:8-9; Phil. 3:3; 1 Cor. 10:12.
- F. The Lord will come secretly, as a thief (Matt. 24:43-44), to those who love Him and will take them away as His treasures; Christ is the preciousness to His believers (1 Pet. 2:7), and our desire is for Him to fill us and saturate us with Himself as our supreme preciousness, our treasure (2 Cor. 4:7), so that we become men of preciousness, even preciousness itself (Dan. 9:23; 10:11, 19).
- G. Especially in these last days, we need to be watchful and give heed to the prophetic word as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts (2 Pet. 1:19); in the few remaining days that we have, let us be those who love and serve the Lord, who are revived and overcoming every day, and who let the world go in order to be ready and waiting with all our heart for the Lord's second coming.

**IV. The Lord's word in Matthew 25:1-13 is a parable for watchfulness:**

- A. Virgins signify believers viewed from the aspect of life; the believers, the kingdom people, are like chaste virgins, bearing the Lord's testimony (the lamp) in the dark age and going out of the world to meet the Lord; for this they need not only the indwelling but also the filling of the Holy Spirit—2 Cor. 11:2; Luke 11:13:
  1. Lamps signify the spirit of the believers, which contains the Spirit of God as the oil—Prov. 20:27; Isa. 61:1; Heb. 1:9; Rom. 8:16:
    - a. The believers shine forth the light of the Spirit of God from within their spirit; in order for the divine light to shine into man's inward parts, God's Spirit as the oil must soak (mingle with) man's spirit as the wick (cf. v. 16) and "burn" together with man's spirit (12:11).
    - b. Thus, the believers become the light of the world and shine as a lamp in the darkness of this age (Matt. 5:14-16; Phil. 2:15-16), bearing the testimony of the Lord for the glorification of God.

2. *Went forth* (Matt. 25:1) indicates that we believers do not settle or linger in any place; instead, we are going out of the world to meet the coming Christ as our Bridegroom.
  3. As the Lord's seeking ones who are waiting for the Lord's coming, we are going out with Him to meet Him by leaning on Him as our Beloved, trusting in Him helplessly and constantly enjoying Him as our "going-out" strength to leave the world behind—S. S. 8:5a.
- B. "The foolish, when they took their lamps, did not take oil with them; but the prudent took oil in their vessels with their lamps"—Matt. 25:3-4:
1. Vessels signify the souls of the believers—Rom. 9:21, 23-24.
  2. Having oil in our lamp is to have the Spirit of God dwelling in our spirit; taking oil in our vessel is to have the Spirit of God filling and saturating our soul that we may be enabled to live the virgin life for the Lord's testimony—Matt. 25:4, 9-10.
  3. We have the Spirit in our regenerated spirit, but there is a question as to whether or not we have an extra portion of the Spirit in our soul.
  4. The prudent virgins took oil in their vessels with their lamps; this signifies having an extra portion of the oil by being filled with the Spirit in our soul for our transformation—2 Cor. 3:18.
- C. One of the best ways to gain the oil, to receive more of the Spirit, is by musing on God's word in order to have intimate fellowship with Him in a spirit and atmosphere of prayer—Psa. 119:15, 23, 25, 27, 48, 78, 97, 99, 148; John 6:63; Eph. 6:17-18.
- D. "The foolish said to the prudent, Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out. But the prudent answered, saying, Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you; go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves"—Matt. 25:8-9:
1. To buy means to pay a price; we need to pay the price for the filling of the Spirit in our soul—v. 4; cf. Prov. 23:23; Rev. 3:18:
    - a. The Spirit who came into our spirit (Rom. 8:16) was given to us freely, but the saturating Spirit as the extra portion of oil to fill our soul is not free; this is something for which we have to pay a price to buy.
    - b. The price involves matters such as giving up the world, dealing with the self, loving the Lord above all, and counting all things loss on account of Christ—Matt. 16:24-26; Mark 12:30; Phil. 3:7-8.
  2. Our urgent need is to gain more of the Spirit as the consummation of the processed Triune God, to live a life of buying an extra portion of the Spirit to saturate our entire being—Matt. 25:9; cf. Dan. 5:27.
- E. The foolish virgins, who do not take oil in their vessels and who are not ready when the Lord Jesus comes, will miss the wedding feast; whether or not we will be raptured early to enter into the wedding feast depends upon our daily buying of the Spirit—Matt. 25:10-12; Rev. 19:7-9; 2 Cor. 4:16; Titus 3:5:
1. For us to be qualified to be raptured to enter into the Bridegroom's marriage feast requires our passing through a long period of accumulating sufficient spiritual oil in our vessel—Rev. 19:7-9.
  2. If we would be prudent and wise virgins, those who are watchful in life, we need to redeem the time; this means that we seize every available opportunity to be filled with the Spirit; the sufficient oil will be our entry to the wedding feast—Eph. 5:16.
- F. To be watchful is to be filled with the Spirit all day long; if we allow the Spirit to saturate our entire being, we are watchful persons, making ourselves ready and being prepared by the Lord for His second coming—vv. 14-18; Rev. 19:7; 21:2.
- G. Every day we need to be watchful by paying the price to buy the Spirit as the golden oil so that we may supply the churches with the Spirit for the testimony of Jesus and be re-

warded by the Lord to participate in the marriage dinner of the Lamb—Matt. 25:9-10; Rev. 3:18; Zech. 4:6, 11-14; Judg. 9:9.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1990*, vol. 3, “The Up-to-date Presentation of the God-ordained Way and the Signs concerning the Coming of Christ,” pp. 574-579

*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1990*, vol. 3, “The Up-to-date Presentation of the God-ordained Way and the Signs concerning the Coming of Christ,” pp. 585-588

**THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, THE CHURCH LIFE,  
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Message Two

**The Losing of the Soul-life,  
Participating in the Rapture of the Overcomers,  
and Receiving the End of Our Faith—the Salvation of the Soul**

Scripture Reading: Luke 9:23-25; 14:26-35; 17:26-36; 21:34-36; Heb. 10:39; 1 Pet. 1:7-9, 13

**I. If we want to save our soul-life, we will lose it, but if we lose our soul-life for the Lord's sake, we will save it—Matt. 10:39; Luke 9:23-25; 14:26-35:**

- A. In Luke 9:23-25 the Lord Jesus taught the disciples to take up their cross and follow Him by denying their soul-life:
  - 1. To save the soul-life is to allow the soul to have its enjoyment and to escape suffering; to lose the soul-life is to cause the soul to lose its enjoyment and thereby to suffer—Matt. 16:25.
  - 2. To lose the soul-life is to lose the enjoyment of the soul, and to save the soul-life means to preserve the soul in its enjoyment—Mark 8:35.
  - 3. To deny the self is to reject the soul's desire, preference, and choice—Luke 9:23.
  - 4. We must deny our soul, our soulish life, with all its pleasures in this age, so that we may gain it in the enjoyment of the Lord in the coming age—1 Pet. 1:9.
  - 5. If we allow our soul to suffer the loss of its enjoyment in this age for the Lord's sake, we will cause our soul to have its enjoyment in the kingdom age; we will share the Lord's joy in ruling over the earth—Matt. 25:21, 23.
- B. In Luke 14:26-35 the Lord taught us to be absolute in following Him and to hate everything, even our own soul-life, that distracts, hinders, and frustrates us from following Him faithfully:
  - 1. As the salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13), the believers' taste depends on their renouncing of the earthly things—Luke 14:33-34.
  - 2. Believers may lose their taste—their function in the kingdom of God—by not being willing to renounce all the things of the present life—v. 34.
  - 3. If the believers lose their taste, their function, they will be fit neither for the land, signifying the church as God's farm (1 Cor. 3:9), which issues in the coming kingdom (Rev. 11:15), nor for the manure pile, signifying hell, the filthy place in the universe (21:8); having been saved from eternal perdition but being unfit for the coming kingdom, they will be thrown out from the glory of the kingdom in the millennium and be put aside for discipline—Luke 14:35.

**II. If we lose our soul-life, we may participate in the rapture of the overcomers—17:26-36; 21:34-36:**

- A. In order to participate in the rapture of the overcomers so that we may enjoy the Lord's parousia (presence, coming) and escape the great tribulation, we must overcome the stupefying effect of man's living today—17:26-30:
  - 1. The conditions of evil living that stupefied the generation of Noah before the deluge and the generation of Lot before the destruction of Sodom portray the perilous condition of man's living before the Lord's parousia and the great tribulation—Matt. 24:3, 21.
  - 2. As followers of the Lord Jesus, we need to overcome the stupefying effect of the world's indulgent living by losing our soul-life in this age—Luke 17:31-33.
- B. Preserving the soul-life is related to lingering in the earthly and material things—vv. 31, 33:
  - 1. We linger in the earthly things because we care for our soul's enjoyment in the present age—cf. 2 Tim. 4:10.
  - 2. Lot's wife became a pillar of salt because she took a lingering look backward at Sodom, indicating that she loved and treasured the evil world that God was going to judge and utterly destroy—Luke 17:32:
    - a. She was rescued from Sodom, but she did not reach the safe place that Lot reached—Gen. 19:15-30.
    - b. Although she did not perish, she was not fully saved, but, like the salt that becomes tasteless (Luke 14:34-35), she was left in a place of shame; this is a solemn warning to the world-loving believers—1 John 2:15-17, 28.
  - 3. Lingering in the earthly things for the sake of our soul's enjoyment will cause us to lose our soul; that is, our soul will suffer the loss of its enjoyment in the coming kingdom age—Luke 17:33.
- C. Luke 17:31-36 speaks of our reaction to the rapture call:
  - 1. These verses depict the soul-life in its engagement not with sinful things but with the things of earth; the Lord's charge here is related to the believers' overcoming in their practical life—vv. 34-36.
  - 2. Whether or not the living believers participate in the rapture of the overcomers depends on their reaction to the call to go; the rapture will occur secretly and unexpectedly—v. 31:
    - a. This call will not produce a miraculous last-minute change in us that has no relation to our previous life with the Lord.
    - b. In that moment we will discover our heart's real treasure; if this treasure is the Lord Himself, there will be no backward look—v. 32.
    - c. We need the cross to work in us a thorough detachment in spirit from everything and everyone other than the Lord Himself—v. 31.
  - 3. Certain ones are taken because they have overcome the stupefying effect of self-indulgent living in this age to be raptured into the enjoyment of the Lord's parousia—vv. 26-30, 34-36.
- D. In Luke 21:34-36 the Lord Jesus warns us to take heed to ourselves and to be watchful at every time, beseeching that we would "prevail to escape all these things which are about to happen and stand before the Son of Man":
  - 1. *Prevail* here means to have strength and ability; the strength and ability to escape the great tribulation come from watching and beseeching—v. 36.
  - 2. *Escape* refers to being raptured before the great tribulation—Matt. 24:21.

3. *All these things which are about to happen* are all the things of the great tribulation.
4. *Stand before the Son of Man* corresponds with *standing* in Revelation 14:1, indicating that the raptured overcomers will stand before the Savior on Mount Zion in the heavens before the great tribulation.

**III. The proving of our faith being found unto praise, glory, and honor results in the receiving of the end of our faith—the salvation of our souls—1 Pet. 1:7-9:**

- A. As we live under the government of God, we will be made sorrowful by various trials and experience the proving of our faith—vv. 6-7:
  1. The trials in verse 6 are sufferings that test the quality of our life as believers.
  2. These trials are used by God to prove and try our faith to see whether we will follow Christ in suffering—2:19-23; 3:14-18.
  3. The emphasis in 1 Peter 1:7 is not on faith but on the proving of faith by trials that come through sufferings.
- B. The salvation of the soul in 1 Peter 1:9 means that our soul will be saved from sufferings into the full enjoyment of the Lord at His revelation, His coming back—v. 7; 3:17; 4:1, 12-16, 19:
  1. At the Lord's revelation, some believers will enter into the joy of the Lord, and some will suffer in weeping and gnashing of teeth—Matt. 25:21, 23, 30; 24:45-46, 51.
  2. To enter into the Lord's joy is the salvation of our souls—25:21, 23.
  3. At the revelation of the Lord Jesus, His coming, our soul will be saved, and we will be qualified to participate in the Lord's enjoyment in the coming age—1 Pet. 1:9, 13.
- C. If we would receive as the end of our faith the salvation of our souls, we must not be "of those who shrink back to ruin but of those who have faith to the gaining of the soul"—Heb. 10:39:
  1. The gaining, or saving, of our soul depends on how we deal with our soul in following the Lord after we are saved and regenerated.
  2. If we lose our soul now for the Lord's sake, we will save it, and it will be saved, or gained, at the Lord's coming back—Luke 9:24; 1 Pet. 1:9.
  3. The gaining of the soul will be the reward of the kingdom to the overcoming followers of the Lord—Heb. 10:35; Matt. 16:22-28.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1978, vol. 1, "The Exercise of the Kingdom for the Building of the Church," pp. 90-92*

*Life-study of Luke, pp. 337-339, 414-417*

**THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, THE CHURCH LIFE,  
THE CONSUMMATION OF THE AGE, AND THE COMING OF THE LORD**

Message Three

**Being Faithful in Service in the Lord's Commission and in His Gifts  
for His Second and Imminent Coming**

Scripture Reading: Matt. 24:45-51; 25:14-30

**I. Matthew 24:45-51 reveals that we must be faithful in service in the Lord's commission to give God as food to the members of His household so that we may win Christ as our reward in the coming kingdom:**

- A. God has a household and a household administration, an economy, to dispense Himself as food to the members of His household for His expression—1 Tim. 1:4; 3:15; Eph. 2:19.
- B. God has set faithful and prudent slaves over His household as household administrators, stewards, channels of supply, to give His people food at the proper time—Matt. 24:45; 1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 3:2; 1 Cor. 4:1; 1 Pet. 4:10; Phil. 1:25.
- C. *Give them food* refers to ministering the word of God and Christ as the life supply to the believers in the church; Christ as the life-giving Spirit is our food, embodied and realized in the word of life—Matt. 24:45; John 6:57, 63, 68; Acts 5:20; 1 John 5:16:
  - 1. In order to enjoy the Lord as our spiritual food so that we can feed others, we must pray over and muse on His word, tasting and enjoying it through careful consideration—Eph. 6:17-18; Psa. 119:15; Ezek. 3:1-4.
  - 2. We must devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word—Acts 6:4; 2 Cor. 3:6, 8; John 7:37-39; cf. Heb. 7:25; 8:2.
- D. To say in our heart that our Master delays is to love the present evil age and not to love the Lord's appearing—Matt. 24:48; 2 Tim. 4:8, 10; cf. Acts 26:16:
  - 1. We must beware of covetousness, not storing up treasure for ourselves but being rich toward God—Luke 12:16-21; 2 Cor. 6:10; Eph. 3:8.
  - 2. "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32) means that we should not love and treasure the evil world that God is going to judge and utterly destroy; this is a solemn warning to the world-loving believers—vv. 28-32; cf. Rom. 1:21, 25.
  - 3. We must be watchful and beseeching so that the day of the Lord's coming would not come upon us suddenly as a snare—Luke 21:34-36; cf. Matt. 2:3.
- E. To beat our fellow slaves is to mistreat fellow believers—24:49a; Acts 9:4:
  - 1. We must not judge and condemn our fellow believers but be kind to them, tender-hearted, forgiving them, even as God in Christ forgave us—Luke 6:37; Eph. 4:31-32; cf. 1 Thes. 5:14.
  - 2. We must not revile or criticize our brothers but consider them more excellent than ourselves—2 Tim. 3:1-2; 1 Pet. 3:8-10; Jude 10; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Phil. 2:2-4, 29; Rom. 12:3:
    - a. Reviling is when we cause the saints to inwardly suffer pain or to be inwardly wounded by assailing and criticizing them harshly with abusive language.
    - b. The Lord's way is to bind up our wounds (healing us) and to pour oil and wine on our wounds (giving us the Holy Spirit and the divine life)—Luke 10:33-34.
    - c. One of the reasons the church is divided and damaged is that there are reviling words; those who take in reviling words bear the same responsibility as those



- who speak reviling words; in order for the church to maintain the oneness, we have to withstand reviling words.
- d. The consciousness of sin comes from knowing God; in the same way, the consciousness of reviling words comes from the knowledge of the Body; reviling words are opposed to the testimony of the Body.
  - e. The Lord warns us that revilers will not inherit the kingdom of God in the next age as a reward to the overcoming saints—1 Cor. 6:10.
3. We must not lord it over our fellow believers but serve them as slaves to feed them with the resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit—1 Pet. 5:3; Matt. 20:25-28; cf. Num. 17:8.
- F. To eat and drink with the drunken is to keep company with worldly people, who are drunk with worldly things—Matt. 24:49b; cf. Eph. 5:18:
1. Because of their divine nature and holy standing, the believers should not be yoked together with the unbelievers; this should be applied to all intimate relationships between believers and unbelievers, not only to marriage and business—2 Cor. 6:14; 1 Cor. 15:33; cf. Prov. 13:20.
  2. We must flee youthful lusts and pursue the all-inclusive Christ with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart—2 Tim. 2:22.
- G. The faithful and prudent slave will be rewarded with the authority to rule in the manifestation of the kingdom, whereas the evil slave will be cut off from the glorious Christ, from the glory of His kingdom, and from His glorious presence in His kingdom—Matt. 24:47, 51.

## **II. Matthew 25:14-30 reveals that we must be faithful in service in the Lord's gifts to make a profit for Him so that we may enter into the joy of the Lord in the coming kingdom:**

- A. The Lord likened Himself to a man going abroad (into the heavens) and delivering to his slaves his possessions; *his possessions* signifies the church (Eph. 1:18) with all the believers, who constitute God's household (Matt. 24:45).
- B. To one of his slaves the master gave five talents, to another two, and to another one—to each according to his own ability—25:15:
1. Talents signify spiritual gifts (spiritual skills and abilities)—Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:4; 1 Pet. 4:10; 2 Tim. 1:6.
  2. All the members of the Body of Christ are gifted, and all are gifts—Rom. 12:6a; Eph. 4:7-8.
  3. *Own ability* signifies our natural ability, which is constituted of God's creation and our learning—Matt. 25:15; cf. Acts 7:22:
    - a. The natural strength and ability become useful in resurrection for our service to the Lord in order to make us both pillars and pillar builders for the fulfilling of God's eternal purpose—1 Cor. 15:10, 58; cf. 2 Cor. 6:1-2; 1 Kings 7:13-22 with footnotes; Eph. 4:8, 11-12, 16; Gal. 2:9; Rev. 3:12.
    - b. Moses, Peter, and Paul's natural ability passed through the cross and came up in resurrection to be used by the Lord for the building up of His Body—Acts 7:22-36; Luke 22:32-33; 1 Pet. 5:5-6; Acts 22:3; Phil. 3:5-8, 14; Gal. 2:20; 2 Cor. 4:10-12; 2 Tim. 2:11.
- C. Trading with talents signifies using the gift that the Lord has given us; gaining other talents signifies that the gift we received from the Lord has been used to the fullest extent, without any loss or waste—Matt. 25:16-17; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6; 4:5b.

- D. In contrast to the five-talented and two-talented ones, the one-talented one went off, dug in the earth, and hid his master's money; this signifies not using the Lord's gift to save people and to minister His riches to them—Matt. 25:18, 27:
1. The earth signifies the world; thus, *dug in the earth* signifies becoming involved in the world to bury the gift we have received from the Lord.
  2. *Hid his master's money* signifies rendering the Lord's gift useless, letting it lie waste under the cloak of certain earthly excuses; to make any excuse for not using the Lord's gift is to hide the gift.
- E. The master says to the evil and slothful slave that he should have deposited the master's money with the money changers (the bankers), and when he came, he would have recovered what was his with interest—v. 27:
1. In a sense, we may say that the money changers (the bankers) are all the new ones, young ones, and backsliding ones; the best way for us to use our talent is to take care of others, to become interested in others and concerned for them in order to dispense Christ into them.
  2. As we spend time with the Lord and open to Him regarding whom we should take care of, He will burden us; as we contact and have fellowship with others by being one with the Lord in cherishing them with His presence and nourishing them with His riches, we will spontaneously use our talent.
  3. Then when the Lord comes, He will recover what was His with interest as the profitable result that we gain for the Lord's work by using His gift.
- F. When the Lord comes back, He will settle accounts with us; this signifies the Lord's judging at His judgment seat (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10) in the air (within His parousia) where the believers' living, conduct, and work will be judged for reward or punishment (1 Cor. 4:5; Matt. 16:27; 25:19; 1 Cor. 3:13-15).
- G. The Lord's reward is not related to the size and quantity of our work but to our faithfulness in using His gift to the fullest extent; Christ Himself will be our crown of life, crown of righteousness, and crown of glory as a reward to us for our enjoyment in the coming kingdom—Matt. 25:23; Rev. 2:10; James 1:12; 2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 5:4.
- H. In the coming kingdom the Lord's gift will be taken away from the slothful believers, and they will be cast into outer darkness, but the faithful believers' gift will be increased, and they will enter into the joy of their master (Matt. 25:21, 23); to participate in the Lord's joy is the greatest reward, better than glory and position, in the kingdom—vv. 21, 30.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1979*, vol. 2, "Basic Lessons on Service," pp. 100-104

*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1985*, vol. 5, "The Way to Practice the Lord's Present Move," pp. 514-517, 539-546

**THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, THE CHURCH LIFE,  
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Message Four

**Fighting the Good Fight, Finishing the Course,  
and Loving the Lord's Appearing**

Scripture Reading: 2 Tim. 4:7-8, 10; 1 Tim. 1:4, 18; 6:12; Acts 20:24; Heb. 12:1-2

**I. "I have fought the good fight"—2 Tim. 4:7a:**

- A. A proper Christian life involves fighting the good fight against Satan and his kingdom of darkness and for the interests of God's kingdom—Eph. 6:10-19.
- B. Paul considered the ministry a warfare for Christ, just as the priestly service was considered a military service, a warfare—2 Tim. 2:3; Num. 4:23, 30, 35.
- C. "No one serving as a soldier entangles himself with the affairs of this life"; this means that to fight the good fight for God's interests on earth, we need to clear away all earthly entanglements—2 Tim. 2:4.
- D. Paul charged Timothy, his faithful co-worker, to fight against the differing teachings and to fight for God's economy—1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 2:3-4.
- E. To war the good warfare is to war against the differing teachings and to carry out God's economy according to the apostle's ministry concerning the gospel of grace and eternal life for the glory of the blessed God—1 Tim. 1:18; 6:12.
- F. Whenever we minister Christ to others, we find ourselves in a battle; hence, we should be soldiers fighting for God's interests—2 Tim. 2:3-4.
- G. To teach and preach God's New Testament economy concerning Christ and the church is to war the good warfare—1 Tim. 1:4; Eph. 5:32.
- H. To fight the good fight of the faith means to fight for God's New Testament economy; in particular, it is to fight for Christ as the embodiment of God and for the church as the Body of Christ—1 Tim. 6:12; 1:4; Col. 2:9, 19.
- I. We fight the good fight of the faith not only objectively but also subjectively by laying hold on the eternal life—1 Tim. 6:12.

**II. "I have finished the course"—2 Tim. 4:7b:**

- A. "I consider my life of no account as if precious to myself, in order that I may finish my course and the ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus"—Acts 20:24:
  - 1. Paul began to run the course of the heavenly race after he was taken possession of by the Lord, and he ran continually that he might finish it—1 Cor. 9:24-26; Phil. 3:12-14.
  - 2. It was not until the last moment of his running the race that the apostle Paul could triumphantly proclaim, "I have finished the course," and have the assurance that he would be rewarded by the Lord at His appearing—2 Tim. 4:7-8.
- B. A proper Christian life involves running the course, the race, for the carrying out of God's economy according to His eternal purpose—1 Cor. 9:24.

- C. We need to seek out the journey that the Lord has ordained and faithfully walk on it, paying any price to wholeheartedly continue on our journey until we reach the end—2 Tim. 4:7.
- D. The journey that the Lord has ordained for us is the race that we all must run—Heb. 12:1:
  - 1. After we are saved, God puts us into a race, which is aimed directly at the kingdom—2 Tim. 4:1b.
  - 2. We cannot choose the course that we want to run; rather, we must run the race that God sets before us—Acts 20:24.
- E. We need to “run with endurance the race which is set before us”—Heb. 12:1:
  - 1. Like the apostle Paul, all Christians must run the race to win the prize, not salvation in the common sense but a reward in a special sense—10:35; 1 Cor. 3:14-15; 9:26-27; Phil. 3:13-14.
  - 2. We need to run the race with endurance, suffering the opposition with endurance and never growing weary or fainting in our souls—Heb. 12:2-3.
- F. We run the Christian race by “looking away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith”—v. 2:
  - 1. Jesus is the Author of faith—the Originator, the Inaugurator, the source, and the cause of faith—v. 2:
    - a. We need to look away unto Jesus with undivided attention by turning away from every other object—vv. 1-2; S. S. 1:4; Psa. 27:4.
    - b. When we look away unto Jesus, He as the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b) transfuses us with Himself, with His believing element.
  - 2. Jesus is the Perfecter of faith—the Finisher and Completer of faith—Heb. 12:2:
    - a. As the Completer of faith, the Lord Jesus continually infuses Himself into us as the believing element and ability—Acts 7:2; Gen. 15:6.
    - b. When we look away unto Him, He ministers heaven, life, and strength to us, transfusing and infusing us with all that He is so that we may be able to run the heavenly race and live the heavenly life on earth—2 Cor. 3:18.
    - c. As we look away unto Him continually, He will finish and complete the faith that we need to run the heavenly race—Heb. 12:1-2.

**III. If the Lord’s second coming is precious to us, we will love His appearing—2 Tim. 4:8:**

- A. Loving the Lord’s appearing and loving the Lord Himself are inseparable—1 Cor. 2:9; 2 Tim. 4:8.
- B. If we are waiting for the Lord to come, we should be those who love His appearing—1 Thes. 1:10; 2 Tim. 4:8.
- C. The Lord’s appearing, His coming back, is a warning, an encouragement, and an incentive to us—vv. 1, 18:
  - 1. We should love the Lord’s appearing and look forward to it with earnest expectation and joy—Rev. 22:20.
  - 2. We should have a living that loves the Lord’s appearing; this causes us not to be discouraged but to remain faithful to the end—2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 17:14.

- D. Loving the Lord's appearing is in contrast to loving the present age—2 Tim. 4:8, 10:
1. An age is a part, a section, or an aspect of the world system of Satan, which is used by him to usurp and occupy people and keep them away from God and His purpose—1 John 5:19; 2:15.
  2. In 2 Timothy 4:10 *the present age* refers to the world that surrounds, attracts, and tempts us; we cannot contact the world unless we contact the present age of the world.
  3. Demas loved the present age; due to the attraction of the present age, he forsook the apostle Paul—v. 10.
  4. In Romans 12:2 Paul exhorts us to not be fashioned according to this age but to be transformed by the renewing of the mind:
    - a. *This age* in verse 2 denotes the present, practical part of the world, which stands in opposition to the Body life and replaces the Body life—vv. 4-5.
    - b. To be fashioned according to this age means to adopt the modern fashions of the present age; to be transformed is to allow an organic element to be wrought into our being, thus producing an inward metabolic change—v. 2; 2 Cor. 3:18.
    - c. Because the present age opposes the church, which is God's will, we must not be fashioned according to it—Rom. 12:2.
    - d. If we are to live in the Body of Christ, we should not follow the present age or be fashioned according to this age or conformed to it—vv. 4-5.
  5. If we love the present age, we will take sides with the world; if we love the Lord's appearing, we will take sides with Him and fight with Him for His interests—2 Tim. 4:1-2, 4-8, 10.
- E. Those who love the Lord, wait for His coming, and love His appearing will overcome—1 Cor. 2:9; 2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 22:20; 17:14.
- F. Loving the Lord's appearing is a proof that we love the Lord and live for Him today; hence, it also becomes a condition for us to receive His reward—2 Tim. 4:8, 18.
- G. To love the Lord's appearing does not mean that we should not live a normal life; rather, the more we love His appearing, the more we need to live a normal life today—Matt. 24:40-42; 2 Thes. 1:10; 3:6-12; 1 Tim. 5:8.
- H. As those who love the Lord Jesus, take Him as our life, live Him, and magnify Him, we should await His coming and love His appearing; this should be our heart's desire and our living as those who hope to enter into His joy, be saved into the Lord's heavenly kingdom, and receive the crown of righteousness—2 Tim. 4:8, 18.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

*Life-study of 2 Timothy*, pp. 57-63