

## Message Three

### Returning to the Family of God and the Practice of the Church Life

Scripture Reading: Lev. 25:10; Eph. 2:19; Luke 15:11-32; Acts 2:46-47; 5:41-42;  
2 Tim. 2:22; Acts 16:25; 17:6b; Phil. 1:19, 22-26

#### **I. “It shall be a jubilee for you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family”—Lev. 25:10:**

- A. We all had lost the possession allotted to us by God; but the year of jubilee came, and we were released to return both to our possession and to our family—Lev. 25:10, 13; Col. 1:12-13:
  - 1. So many worldly people today are either orphans or wanderers; they are homeless—Eph. 2:12.
  - 2. Once we were in the wrong family, the family of slavery; the sounding of the jubilee tells us to return to our own family, to the family of God—Lev. 25:10; Eph. 2:12-13, 19.
  - 3. We all are like the prodigal son, who came back to the father and to his family and could then enjoy his portion, his inheritance; now that we have been returned to God we may enjoy Him as our possession, as our portion and inheritance, and we may also enjoy the real family life in the house of God—Luke 15:11-32; Col. 1:12-13; Acts 26:18.
- B. The church is our real family; therefore, we need to shout joyfully, making a joyful noise to the Lord in the church meetings; this is the real jubilee—Eph. 2:19; 5:18-19; Psa. 95:1-2; Lev. 25:10.

#### **II. The book of Acts shows us the enjoyment and propagation of the resurrected Christ as the jubilee of grace in the disciples’ practice of the church life:**

- A. “Day by day,...breaking bread from house to house, they partook of their food with exultation and simplicity of heart, praising God...And the Lord added together day by day those who were being saved”—2:46-47.
- B. “So then the church throughout the whole of Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it was multiplied”—9:31.
- C. “Barnabas...when he arrived and saw the grace of God, rejoiced and encouraged them all to remain with the Lord with purpose of heart”—11:22b-23.
- D. “And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon Your name”; “But flee youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart”—9:14; 2 Tim. 2:22.
- E. “So they went from the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be dishonored on behalf of the Name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and announcing the gospel of Jesus as the Christ”—Acts 5:41-42.
- F. “About midnight Paul and Silas, while praying, sang hymns of praise to God; and the prisoners were listening to them”—16:25:
  - 1. We should praise the Lord all our life; we should sing praises to our God—Psa. 146:2; *Hymns*, #717, #124, #166.
  - 2. The loudest praise comes very often from the ones who are passing through hardships, adverse environments, and downtrodden feelings; this kind of praise is most pleasing to God and is blessed by Him—cf. Psa. 23:4.

3. The nature of praise is an offering, a sacrifice; in other words, praise comes from pain, suffering, and loss; God desires His children to praise Him through everything and in every situation—Heb. 13:15.
- G. “They said, Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household...And he brought them up into his house and set a table before them; and he exulted because he had believed in God with all his household”—Acts 16:31, 34.
- H. “These men who have upset the world have come here also”—17:6b.

**III. The full experience and enjoyment of the jubilee is not an individualistic matter but a Body matter; hence, for the sake of the jubilee, we need to live in the Body, by the Body, through the Body, and for the Body and always do what is best for the Body—Phil. 1:19, 22-26; 2:1-2.**

### Message Three—Group Time

#### VERSES FOR PRAY-READING

---

<b>Eph. 2:19</b>	So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.
<b>1 Thes. 5:16-18a</b>	<b>16</b> Always rejoice, <b>17</b> Unceasingly pray, <b>18a</b> In everything give thanks.
<b>Acts 2:46-47</b>	<b>46</b> And day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they partook of their food with exultation and simplicity of heart, <b>47</b> Praising God and having grace with all the people. And the Lord added together day by day those who were being saved.

#### MINISTRY EXCERPTS

---

We all had lost the possession allotted to us by God. But in our salvation, the New Testament jubilee, we returned to our possession. Furthermore, we have returned to our family, to the divine family. We had sold ourselves as slaves and thus lost the right to be with our family. But the year of jubilee came, and we were released to return both to our possession and to our family. Now we are rich, and we are free in our divine family. Therefore, we need to shout joyfully, making a joyful noise to the Lord in the church meetings. This is the real jubilee. (*Life-study of Leviticus*, p. 505)

#### MEMBERS OF THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD

[Ephesians 2:19] reveals that we are also “members of the household of God.” This phrase indicates the house of God. Both the Jewish and Gentile believers are members of God’s house. God’s house is a matter of life and enjoyment; all believers were born of God into His house to enjoy His riches.

Verse 19 speaks of the saints, the house of God, and the kingdom of God. The saints are individuals, but the house of God is corporate and results in the kingdom of God. If there were no house, there could be no kingdom. Firstly we are saints, individuals. Then, corporately, we are the house of God resulting in the kingdom of God. Therefore, we have both the individual aspect of the Christian life and the corporate aspect in the house of God and the kingdom of God.

In verse 19 there is the thought of intimacy, seen in the term *fellow-citizens*. As unsaved Gentiles, we once were far off from God and the commonwealth of Israel, but now we have an intimate relationship with the saints. We are fellow-citizens of the saints and members of God’s household. Among the citizens of the United States, there is a certain intimacy. But this intimacy cannot compare with that among members of a family. The Jews and the Gentiles are not only citizens of the same kingdom, but also folks of the same family. We need to regard the saints in an intimate way as our folks. Being members of the family of God must not only be our doctrine, but also our experience. In the universe God has just one household, one family. No matter what our background may be, as believers we all

are members of God's unique universal family, and all the saints are our folks. Do not take this matter lightly, but consider it seriously as an important aspect of the church. What an intimate relationship we have in the household of God! (*Life-study of Ephesians*, pp. 230-232)

### **Practicing the Church Life for the Jubilee**

In this portion of Leviticus [chapter 25] concerning the jubilee we have seen the enjoyment of Christ, the enjoyment of the church life, and the matter of the proper relationship with the saints. According to my experiences, the easiest of these three to have is the enjoyment of Christ. It is not as easy to enjoy the church life as it is to enjoy Christ. The hardest of these is to have the proper relationship with our fellow saints. This is a matter of utmost concern, for it touches our motive, our spirit, our attitude, and our words.

When we are living in the church life, we need others. This is indicated in verse 35 by the words "that he may live with you"...The church life does not depend only on our loving the Lord or on our loving the church life; the church life depends especially on our care for the other saints. We need to take care of the saints in a good way, and this care involves our motive, our spirit, our attitude, and our words. In contacting the saints, we may be wrong in our motive, attitude, and spirit, and our words may not be altogether according to the leading of the Lord. I can testify that much of my daily confession to the Lord concerns my motive, spirit, attitude, and words in relation to the saints.

Jubilee is not just a matter of shouting, release, recovery, and restoration, for in the last section of Leviticus 25 there are three tests. These three tests are loving the Lord, loving the church life, and caring for our fellow saints. How do you live with the saints, with your "church mates"? How do you help them to live with you? How can we maintain a situation in which we live together as church mates? This depends on our way of keeping our fellowship and our relationship with them, and it depends on our motive, our spirit, our attitude, and our words. We need a pure motive, a pure and perfect spirit, and a right attitude with the right utterance. This will not only help, edify, and build up the saints; it will also spontaneously build up the Body of Christ. When the Body of Christ comes into existence in a practical way, then the jubilee will be among us. (*Life-study of Leviticus*, pp. 524-526)

### **THE LIVING OF THE JUBILEE BEING A LIVING OF FULLY ENJOYING GOD**

A Christian's life of jubilee should be a life of fully enjoying the Lord, a life that is full of joy and praises. If we cannot rejoice and praise, it proves that we are not living a normal life of the jubilee. This is why 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, "In everything give thanks." This is to give thanks not only in things that are successful but in all things. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1984*, vol. 4, p. 44)

In Paul's case, he and Silas sang hymns of praise to God, and all the doors opened and the chains broke. The jailer believed in the Lord on that day, and his whole family was saved in a joyful way (16:19-34). Paul and Silas offered the sacrifice of praise in the jail. The wounds on their bodies were not yet healed; their pain was not soothed. Their feet were in the stocks, and they were shut in an inner jail of the Roman Empire. What was there to be joyful about? What was there to sing about? But there were two persons with transcendent spirits, who had surpassed everything. They saw that God was still sitting in the heavens; He had not changed at all. They themselves might have changed, their environment might have changed, their feelings might have changed, and their bodies might have been suffering, but God was still sitting on the throne. He was still worthy of their blessings. Our brothers, Paul and Silas, were praying, singing, and praising God. This kind of praise, which arises out of pain and loss, is a sacrifice of praise. This kind of praise is a victory.

When you pray, you are still in the midst of your situation. But when you praise, you soar above your situation...Many times praise works where prayer fails. This is a very basic principle. If you cannot pray, why not praise? The Lord has placed another item in your hands for your victory and for you to

boast in victory. Whenever you run out of strength to pray and you find your spirit heavily oppressed, wounded, or sagging, praise Him. If you cannot pray, try to praise. We invariably think that we should pray when the burden is heavy and praise when the burden is over. But please bear in mind that there are times when the burden is so heavy that you cannot pray. That is the time for you to praise. We do not praise when there is no burden; we praise when the burden becomes too heavy. When you encounter unusual circumstances and problems and are bewildered and feel like collapsing, just remember one thing, “Why not praise?” Here is a golden opportunity. If you offer your praise at that moment, God’s Spirit will operate in you, open all the doors, and break all the chains. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 48, “Messages for Building Up New Believers (1)”, pp. 251-252)

To say that we shall not have suffering when we enjoy the Lord does not mean that our environment will improve. On the contrary, in many cases the environment changes for the worse. Consider the situation of Paul and Silas in Acts 16. Paul and Silas were cast into prison in Philippi. We would expect that this imprisonment would have been a great suffering for them. However, Paul and Silas were not suffering there in prison—they were enjoying the jubilee. They were singing and praising the Lord. Although they were in prison, they had enjoyment, satisfaction, and rest. (*Life-study of Luke*, p. 590)

---

#### QUESTIONS FOR FELLOWSHIP

---

1. How is the jubilee related to the church life?
1. How is a life of praise related to our practice of the church life?
2. What does it mean, in your realization and experience, to offer a sacrifice of praise?