

Message Five

Taking the Shepherding Way in John 21 for the Building Up of the Church

Scripture Reading: Luke 22:31-33; Mark 16:7; John 21:15-19; 2 Cor. 7:2-7; 12:15-16

I. John 21, a chapter on shepherding, is the completion and consummation of the Gospel of John; shepherding is the key to the Gospel of John:

- A. If we do not know what shepherding is, the entire Gospel of John will be in vain to us; it is only when we shepherd others that we can know John in an intrinsic way—3:16; 4:10, 14; 10:9-18; 21:15-17.
- B. The Gospel of John is a book on Christ coming to be our life by cherishing and nourishing us; to cherish people is to make them happy, pleasant, and comfortable (Matt. 9:10; Luke 7:34), and to nourish people is to feed them with the all-inclusive Christ (Matt. 24:45-47):
 1. When Christ as the God-Savior was recognized by Nathanael as the Son of God, He answered him that he would see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on Him as the Son of Man, like the heavenly ladder seen by Jacob in his dream, as a kind of cherishing to encourage Nathanael to follow Him that he might participate in His nourishment with all the divine benefits as revealed in the entire Gospel of John—1:45-51.
 2. When Christ as the God-Savior wanted to save an immoral woman of Samaria, He had to travel from Judea to Galilee through Samaria and detoured from the main way of Samaria to the city of Sychar, and He waited at the well of Jacob, near Sychar, for His object to come that He might cherish her by asking her to give Him something to drink so that He might nourish her with the water of life, which is the flowing Triune God Himself—4:1-14.
 3. When none of the accusing Pharisees could condemn the adulterous woman, Christ as the God-Savior, in His humanity, said to her, “Neither do I condemn you,” to cherish her that He, as the great I Am, might nourish her with the freedom from sin and enable her to “sin no more”—8:3-11, 24, 34-36.

II. After His resurrection the Lord shepherded Peter and commissioned him to feed His lambs and shepherd His sheep; this is to incorporate the apostolic ministry with Christ’s heavenly ministry to take care of God’s flock, the church that issues in the Body of Christ—21:15-17:

- A. Peter was self-confident in his natural strength and ability, even to the point of thinking that he would follow the Lord both to prison and to death—Luke 22:33.
- B. Peter was tested, and he denied the Lord three times, even before a little maid—John 18:15-18, 25-27.
- C. Peter was absolutely defeated and became a complete failure so that he might realize that he was absolutely untrustworthy and should no longer have any confidence in himself—Matt. 26:69-75; Phil. 3:3.
- D. The trials through which we pass are used by the Lord to sift and destroy our natural disposition and habits and to bring in the constitution of the Holy Spirit in maturity and sweetness—Rom. 8:28; Luke 22:31-32; cf. Jer. 48:11.

- E. The angel's message to the three sisters who discovered the resurrection of the Slave-Savior was for them to "go, tell His disciples and Peter"—Mark 16:7:
 - 1. The phrase *and Peter* indicates that although Peter had failed, stumbled, and fallen, the Lord had not forsaken him; *and Peter* also means *and you*—you who have failed like Peter.
 - 2. May we all see what kind of heart the Lord has toward us; it is impossible for Him not to love us, for Him to forget us, or for Him to forsake us—Rom. 5:6-10; Zech. 2:8; Isa. 49:15-16.
- F. The Lord came to restore Peter's love toward Him, to charge him with the shepherding of His church, and to prepare him for his martyrdom so that he would not follow Him with any confidence in his natural strength—John 21:15-19.
- G. To bear fruit and feed others, we need to enjoy and flow out the riches of the divine life; this requires that we love Him—vv. 15-17; 7:38.
- H. Through Peter's failure, he learned to serve the brothers by faith in the Lord and with humility, shepherding the flock of God—Luke 22:31-32; 1 Pet. 5:2-6.

III. Taking the shepherding way to preach the gospel and revive the church is a life of ministering Christ to others in love for the building up of the church; this life is a fruitful life—Acts 20:20, 31; 1 Cor. 8:1; John 15:5:

- A. In taking care of the churches and in shepherding the saints, what is needed is the intimate concern of a ministering life—2 Cor. 7:2-7; 12:15-16; Philem. 7, 12:
 - 1. In the shepherding of the saints, it is possible that we may kill others; the reason for this killing, this fruitlessness, is the lack of intimate concern—cf. 2 Cor. 3:6:
 - a. The milk of the word of God, the life supply of Christ, should be used to nourish the new believers in Christ, not to "boil" them—Exo. 23:19b.
 - b. If we have the ability to carry on a work but lack an intimate concern, our work will be fruitless; our heart must be enlarged to embrace all believers, regardless of their condition—2 Cor. 6:10-11.
 - 2. How fruitful we are, how much fruit we bear, does not depend on what we are able to do; it depends on whether we have an intimate concern.
 - 3. A ministering life is a life that warms up others; if we would minister life to the saints, we must have a genuine concern for them, a concern that is emotional, deep, and intimate.
- B. Love is the most excellent way for us to be anything and to do anything for the building up of the Body of Christ—2 Tim. 1:7; 1 Cor. 12:31b; 13:4-8, 13:
 - 1. We must have the kind of love to go and tell the dormant ones who think that the church condemns them that the church does not condemn anyone; rather, the church wants to see all the dormant ones come back.
 - 2. Without the Lord's mercy, we would be the same as the dormant ones; therefore, we must love them.
 - 3. It all depends upon love, as the wise king Solomon said, "Love covers all transgressions"—Prov. 10:12b.
 - 4. "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up"—1 Cor. 8:1b.