

## SERVING GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE

### GOD'S DESIRE IS FOR FAITHFUL STEWARDS

*I Corinthians 4:1-2—Let a man so account of us as servants of Christ, and stewards of [the] mysteries of God. Here, further, it is sought in stewards, that a man be found faithful.*

Let's have a word of prayer:

*Dear Lord, as we gather here this morning our hearts are full of gratitude. We want to thank Thee for what Thou hast done during these days. We thank Thee for all Thy mercies and grace that Thou hast so bountifully given to us. Dear Lord, as we come to this last session of this conference we continue to look to Thee. If there is something more Thou wants to say, please speak; Thy servants heareth. And we are ready to give Thee all the praise and glory. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.*

I always feel hesitant to speak after the Lord's Table because we have been brought to the very presence of our dear Lord. What else do we want? I always feel speaking after the Lord's Table is too much, but I have to obey my brothers.

We have been fellowshipping together these days on "Serving God's Eternal Purpose". The mystery of God has been hidden throughout the ages and now has been revealed to the prophets and the apostles. And thank God, now it has been made known to us. We know the mystery of God is Christ because in God's heart His Son is everything to Him. And it is the will of the Father to bring all things to the feet of His beloved Son. He wants His Son to sum up or to head up all things. And that means everything will speak of Christ and glorify Christ, and this ministry has been given to His church.

#### **All Who are Sons of God are Stewards of His Mystery**

When Paul mentioned this in I Corinthians, chapter 4, he referred especially to himself and Sosthenes. But of course, we know that in a general way it can be applied to all of us. Who can say we are not the servants of Christ? Of course, we are. All who are the sons of God are the servants of God, and we are also the stewards of His mystery. In other words, God has committed His mystery into our hands, and what a tremendous responsibility this is! We are not only to declare the mystery of God, but we are to show by our life this mystery—that Christ is everything to us. This is a tremendous commitment.

## **Stewards are Likened to Boat-Rowers**

So far as the mystery of God is concerned, it is not just something to declare. Of course, we want to declare it. But if we are going to declare it, we have to back it up with our lives; otherwise our declaration will be useless. So this is very practical. Sometimes we may think this is too high, but actually it is practical. In other words, God expects every one of us to be a good steward of His mystery. We are told by those who know Greek that the background of the word *steward* points to boat rowers. We know that in the olden days they did not have machines, so they had to use men to row the boat, and that word has the background meaning of boat-rowers. Boat-rowers were usually those who would stay below the deck. Therefore, they were not seen, but they were the ones who made the boat sail. And when they rowed the boat, they had to row in unison so that the boat would go straight. Boat-rowing was a very important work because without them the boat would not be able to sail. So as we are serving the Lord we are not supposed to be seen, but we are to do the work.

## **Signs of His Second Coming**

In the Bible, there are several occasions when our Lord Jesus mentioned this matter of stewardship. In Matthew 24, the Lord Jesus was talking about His second coming, and He said He would come in a time like the days of Noah when people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. In other words, everything seemed to be as usual and centered upon human luxury. Suddenly, after Noah and his family entered into the ark, God shut the door and rain began to fall until the whole world was covered with water. Then the Lord said, “Two are working in the field, one is taken and one is left, two are grinding at the mill in the morning, one is taken and one is left.” And the Gospel of Luke tells us that two are sleeping, one is taken and one is left. Why is this so? Because the Lord shall come like a thief. We know the Lord is coming back and we all expect Him to come. But do we know how the Lord will come?

I often feel that the understanding of the hymn writers, who wrote some of the hymns that we sing concerning the coming of the Lord, is that He will come with trumpet sound and with His angels. Every eye will see Him and say, “We are waiting to see Him.” But when I sing these hymns, I always feel one thing: it is too late because the Lord will come in two stages and in two ways.

When the Lord was ready to leave the world, He took His disciples to the Mount of Olives. He gradually rose up from there as the disciples looked at Him, and then a cloud took Him. He was still going up, but even though the disciples could not see Him, they continued to look. And two men in white appeared and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you look up because He who has gone up will come back in like manner.” It is important to know that He will come back in like manner. In other words, that is the way He will return. So we know that when the Lord shall come, it will be in two stages.

## **The Two Stages of His Coming**

The first stage is from heaven to the air and it is invisible because the Lord said He would come like a thief. Do you ever see a thief come to a house blowing a trumpet and saying, “I am coming”? I do not think so. I have never heard of one thief like that. And when the thief shall come, what will he steal? Will he steal your garbage? No, if he did I would welcome him. But strangely, he knows where your treasure is, so he will take the treasure and leave the garbage. That is the way the Lord will come in the first stage—from the heaven to the air, invisible. So what are we expecting? Do you expect the Lord to come at any moment? Those who study the Bible tell us that all the prophecies before the coming of the Lord have been fulfilled. Of course, there are many prophecies yet to be fulfilled, but they refer to His coming and after His coming. All the prophecies preceding His coming have been fulfilled; therefore, what are we waiting for? Are we waiting for some prophecy to be fulfilled and then we will begin to get ready to meet Him? It is too late.

Every prophecy preceding His coming has been fulfilled. So what will happen next? Suddenly, all over the world some people will disappear. The earth is round, therefore in the parable it says, “Two are working in the field which is midday, two are grinding at the mill which is done in the morning, and two are sleeping because it is night.” This does not mean that there are six here; it is two. But the earth is round and in some places it is early morning, in other places it is midday and in another place it is midnight. So this will happen all over the world, that one will be taken and one will be left. That is the next event that will take place in this world.

We know that the number of the church is twelve, but here there are only two. Where are the other ten? Matthew 25 tells us of ten virgins, and in the same way we find that five are foolish and five are wise. The five wise ones will go out to meet the Bridegroom and enter into the marriage. But the five foolish ones will have to go and buy oil. I do not know whether they got it or not, but they tried. However, when they came back, the door was shut and they were left outside weeping and regretting. These ten virgins represent those who have died throughout the centuries. So here are the ten, and when you add the ten and two it is twelve. That is the number of the church.

## **The Longsuffering of God in Waiting for the Church to be Ready**

Before the Lord Jesus left He promised that He would come back to receive us to Himself. So in the first century the saints greeted one another with “the Lord is coming,” especially in the second and third century when the Christians were greatly persecuted. They always greeted one another by saying “the Lord is coming.” That was their blessed hope, but the Lord seemed to be delayed. Of course, we know it is not the Lord who wants to delay; it is the church. Is there any marriage ceremony that the bride is waiting for the bridegroom? Usually the bridegroom is already there and he is so anxious to see his bride. Somehow the bride got delayed, but thank God, eventually she appeared. It is not we who are anxiously waiting for the Lord’s return; it is

our Lord who is anxious to return and receive his bride. But it is the longsuffering of God because we are not ready for Him. So He is waiting, waiting, and waiting. Are we ready for Him? If we are He will come back and receive us.

### **The Next Event to Happen is the Disappearance of Some People**

So the next event that will happen in this world is that one day, suddenly some people will disappear. Why? Because they are ready to meet the Bridegroom. So they will be raptured straight to heaven. They will be the welcoming party to receive the Lord back to this world. It is our blessed hope, and we are living in such a time. We always wonder how the world can be worse than it is now. I wonder if I can say this. We are more hopeful to be raptured alive than all the saints through the past twenty centuries. We are almost on the verge of the coming of the Lord. He can come today, any time, but the point is, are we ready for Him? Are we His true stewards?

We find this symbolized in Revelation 12 where we find the man child. Immediately after the man child is born he is raptured to the throne. So in the first stage of the Lord's coming He will come like a thief and he will steal the ones most precious to Him. Hopefully, by the grace of God we are among the rank.

After the man child is raptured, according to the Scriptures, there will be war in the air. Michael and his angels will fight against Satan and his followers, and there will be no more place for Satan in the air. I believe you know that the headquarters of Satan is in the air, but we read that he was thrown from the air to the earth. The air is to be cleared because the Lord will come from heaven to the air.

### **Those Who are Yet Living**

In I Thessalonians 4 we find Paul comforting the people in Thessalonica because some of the saints had died and the ones who were left thought that those who had died had no more hope. But Paul comforted them with the truth and said, "The day will come when you hear the trumpet sound and the angels singing and the dead in Christ will be raised first, and then those who are still living. The Bible is very clear on that. He said, "Those who are yet living," In other words, there are some living who are not on earth because they have been raptured. But those who are left behind will have to go through the great tribulation. On one hand, the great tribulation is big trouble, but on the other hand, God gives Christians another chance. Maybe through the great tribulation people will wake up and turn to the Lord and be raptured; but they are not going to be raptured to the throne. They are raptured to the air because the Lord is already there waiting for them to come to Him. All believers will be gathered there in the air at which time there will be the judgment seat of Christ. Thank God, we who are saved will not go before the great white judgment of God because we have been saved. Christ has been judged for us and has died for us. However, that does not mean there will be no judgment for us. We will not go through the great

white throne judgment because it is a governmental judgment of eternal life and eternal death. Thank God we are saved. But that does not mean that a Christian will never be judged.

### **The Judgment Seat of Christ**

We will have a family judgment called the judgment seat of Christ, the bema of Christ. Now I came from a big family with four generations living under one roof. Therefore, I know all the blessings and the curses of such a big family. Sometimes in a large family there would be a family gathering and the head of the family would sit on a lifted place called bema. If you were not a part of the family, you had no part in the gathering because it is a family gathering. The head of the family would praise some of the members who had brought honor to the family and would reward them. At the same time those who had brought shame to the family would be judged and scolded and even punished. This is not eternal death, but it is another chance to repent. They will be thrown into darkness where there is gnashing of teeth, and that means regretful. Remember, we will not be judged by the great white throne because it is a governmental judgment, and it is a judgment of eternal life and eternal death. Thank God, Christ was judged for us and is our righteousness; therefore, we can stand before God. Nevertheless, as the family of God we have to go through the judgment seat of Christ to be rewarded or punished.

### **The Lord Comes Back for the Jews**

Then Christ will come back with His overcomers from the air to the Mount of Olives, and when His feet touch the Mount of Olives, it will be broken into two. Scientists have already discovered a line there. If there is an earthquake the Mount of Olives will be broken into two parts because according to Zechariah 12 our Lord will come back for the Jews. At that time, Jerusalem will be broken in two by the enemy so a way is open for those who are still living. Then there is the war of Armageddon which is the last war in this world. Following that there will be the Millennium. So we can read these events from the Word of God. We are on the verge of a great change and the Lord has committed this ministry into our hands.

### **Fulfilling Our Ministry**

How can we fulfill this ministry? Our idea of ministry is something outward that is related to whether we become a preacher or whether we are doing some good work. But the way to fulfill our ministry and bring all things to the feet of our Lord Jesus has to begin in our life because God emphasizes life more than work. Will we fulfill the mission that God has committed to us to bring all things in us to the feet of the Lord Jesus? As the indwelt Holy Spirit begins to speak to us and we obey and bring everything in our lives to the feet of Jesus, then we will be a good steward.

## **Choose to be a Faithful Steward or a Bad Steward**

The Lord Jesus mentions in the Word some things about stewards. One place is in Matthew 24: “Who then is the faithful and prudent bondman whom his lord has set over his household, to give them food in season? Blessed is that bondman whom his lord on coming shall find doing this. Verily I say unto you, that he will set him over all his substance. But if that evil bondman should say in his heart, My lord delays to come, and begin to beat his fellow-bondmen, and eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that bondman shall come in a day when he does not expect it, and in an hour he knows not of, and shall cut him in two and appoint his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth” (vv. 45-51).

The Lord Jesus uses an illustration here of the good and faithful steward or the bad and lazy steward. This is one person; in other words, you can be either. If you become a faithful and good steward and you are faithful and obey whatever the Lord has committed to you, then when He comes, He will greatly reward you. During the kingdom age you will reign with Christ for a thousand years. On the other hand, if you are an unfaithful and lazy servant and think the Lord will delay His return, so you eat and drink and even beat your fellow bondmen, then unexpectedly the Lord shall come and cut you in two and appoint your portion with the hypocrites. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, which means he will be deeply disciplined and will regret his whole life. But thank God, through discipline during the millennium age he will be restored, and in Revelation, chapters 21 and 22, we find that all believers will be overcomers and will reign with Christ.

## **The Will of God is for Us to be Like His Son**

God’s purpose cannot be defeated. In Romans 8, we are told whom God has foreknown, He has called, whom He has called, He has justified, whom He has justified He has sanctified (see vv. 29-30). It is the will of God for us to be like His Son; therefore, we will be conformed to the image of God’s beloved Son. If we are faithful and cooperate with the Holy Spirit then God’s purpose will be fulfilled in our present life. And in the kingdom age to come we will reign with Christ for a thousand years and enjoy greatly. So you can be either a good and faithful steward or you can be an evil and lazy steward. It is up to you to choose today. May the Lord have mercy upon every one of us that we will choose not to be a lazy and a bad steward but be faithful to the Lord.

In Luke 16 we are told of another steward who is accused of wasting the goods of his master. When the master caught him, he said, “You have to give a reckoning of your stewardship.” One day we will all give a reckoning of our stewardship before the judgment seat of Christ. This unfaithful steward was to be relieved of his stewardship; then he tried to make friends by using his master’s property to prepare for his future life. Of course, the Lord praised him for his wisdom

to prepare for himself, but the Lord condemned him for his work. And then the Lord said, “If you are just in small things then He will give you great things” (see vv. 1-10).

### **God’s Purpose is for His People to be Faithful to the Portion Given Them**

By the grace of God may we all be good and faithful stewards. The Lord gives to each different portions. To some He may give five talents, to some He may give two talents, and to others He gives one talent, but everyone has to be faithful to what he has been given. Our abilities are different, so the Lord will give us according to our ability. And if we are faithful to what the Lord has committed to us then He says, “Good and faithful servant, enter the joy of the Lord.”

We have been here for a few days and our purpose is that by the grace of God all of us who have attended this conference—whether you are older or you are younger—His desire is for all of us to be faithful and good stewards. It begins with our own life that we may be able to serve His purpose. May the Lord bless every one of you. Hopefully, by His grace we will all be raptured. This is our prayer.

Let’s pray:

*Dear Lord, we thank Thee for gathering us together this time. We thank Thee for again reminding us that we need to be good and faithful stewards. We give ourselves over to Thee and pray that Thy indwelt Spirit will guide, lead and enable us to bring all things to the feet of Jesus, and through our testimony we may be a witness for Thee. Oh dear Lord, our prayer is that when Thou shall come, we will all be raptured. How we long to see Thee face to face, and our prayer is “Come, Lord Jesus.” We ask in Thy name. Amen.*