

WE ARE CALLED TO BE HIS DISCIPLES

Acts 1:8—But ye will receive power, the Holy Spirit having come upon you, and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Let's have a word of prayer:

Dear Lord, as we gather here our hearts are full of gratitude. We thank Thee for Thy tremendous love for us. Thou hast given us opportunity after opportunity because it is in Thy heart that we should be ready for Thy imminent return. So dear Lord, we just open our hearts to Thee and say, "What hast Thou to say to us?" Lord, we are here. Speak, Thy servants heareth. And to Thee be all the glory. In the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

The theme for this conference is: "You are My witnesses". We have asked, "Does God need witnesses? Who can be His witness?" For He is the first and He is the last. He is the self-existing One. Nobody was there to see how He became God; therefore, nobody can be His witness, and He does not need a witness. Why then does the Bible say, "You are My witnesses"? This is something we want to understand.

God Created the Heavens and the Earth

In my first session, we mentioned that in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. But before He created (if we can use human words to describe it) there was a council among the Godhead. The Father loved His Son so much, He wanted to do something for Him. He wanted to create all things for His Son; but God, being God, knew what was going to transpire; He knew that something would happen. For that reason, (if we may use human words again), God hesitated. So the Son stepped up and said, "Father, if it is Your will to create, go ahead. I am willing to offer Myself as the Lamb." So I Peter 1 tells us that the Lord Jesus, the Son, offered Himself as the Lamb so that He could redeem man and accomplish the purpose of God (see vv. 18-19). That is the reason why we have Genesis 1:1: "God created the heavens and the earth."

The Angels were Created before Man

As we have already mentioned, when God first created the heavens and the earth, He did not create man. The highest of His creation were the angels who are spirits and they do not have a body. They can take a body, but basically they are spirits. Among the angels, God created an

archangel. His name was Lucifer which means brilliant star. The Bible tells us that he was created in such a perfect way. God gave him talents, and he was supposed to be the anointed, covering angel. He was to lead the angels in worshipping God, and in the beginning, he did so; but later on, he began to look into himself. He realized how talented and beautiful he was, and he began to have the thought that he should be equal with God. That is where Lucifer fell and became Satan, the adversary of God, today. For that reason, God dismissed him from the throne. Most likely, the earth at that time was under his control, and when he fell, the earth was surrounded with water. This is what we call, historically speaking, the ice age, and we do not know how long it continued on; but thank God, we have Genesis chapter 1 verse 2. God did not give up; nor does God ever give up.

Man was Created in the Image of God

The Spirit of God brooded over the face of the deep. Then in six days, He restored the earth to be habitable, and on the sixth day God created man. So we were the latecomers. Yet when God created man, He created him according to His own image. God had never done that before. He created all things to glorify His Son, but He never created anything in His own image. We know that image means His inner quality, so He gave man character because He created him with a definite purpose.

Man was to be Used to Defeat the Enemy

What is that purpose? He wanted man to be His witness. In other words, He wanted to use man to defeat His enemy. We have said that for God to destroy Satan would be very easy. God could have used His breath to end Satan, but that would not give God glory. So for the glory of God, He created a man lower than the angels that He could fill man with Himself and use him to defeat His enemy. That will give God glory.

So we have to remember that we are not created for our own sake. If we live for ourselves, we miss the whole meaning of man because God created us for Himself. He wants to use us to overcome His enemy and glorify God.

Man was Told He Could Eat of All the Trees but One

We have already mentioned how God put man in the garden of Eden and gave him a command: “You can eat all the fruit of these trees except one—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is not a bad tree. As a matter of fact, it is better than all the other trees except for the tree of life. There is nothing higher than ethical knowledge. Then why did God not allow man to eat that fruit? It is because God knew if man ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil without the life of God, which means he tried to be independent of God and depend on his own wisdom, that would mean death to man.

Man was Commanded to Till and Guard

So God put man in the garden and gave him a command: “Adam, you are there to till.” God does not want man to be at leisure, having nothing to do, because he would think of himself and sin against God. So God gave him a command to till the earth, to improve the trees that God had put there. Therefore, we are not supposed to be at leisure; we should work.

However, this is only one command. Another command was that God wanted man to guard the garden because it had no wall. God knew His enemy was outside the garden, and He wanted man to be the wall of the garden. Just think of that! It was a huge garden and man was to be the wall around it. What latent power must have been given to man! He could have guarded that huge garden by becoming the wall and prevented God’s enemy from slipping in. So we know that God had endowed Adam with tremendous power.

The Enemy Came in and Tempted Eve and She Ate

Unfortunately, man did not guard the garden, and the enemy slipped in and tempted Eve. We all know the story of how Eve was tempted. She ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, falling into the temptation of the enemy. She doubted God’s love and wisdom and wanted to be independent of Him. She ate it and gave her husband to eat. Did Adam know what he was doing? Certainly he did! Nevertheless, he chose Eve instead of God and ate the forbidden fruit. The consequence was that they discovered they were naked.

Man was Originally Clothed in Glory

When God created the animals and birds, He always gave them clothing. Even today, some people put clothes on dogs, but actually dogs do not need clothing because God has already given them clothing. Do you think that God created man without clothing? I personally feel that God must have clothed man with glory; therefore, man did not sense that they were naked. However, the moment they ate of the forbidden fruit glory left them.

Man Tried to Cover His Nakedness with Fig Leaves

The first thing they discovered was that they were naked. So they tried to use the fig leaves as an apron to try to cover their nakedness. And in the cool of the day the Lord God visited the garden. When they heard the sound, they hid themselves because even with the clothing of the fig leaves, they were still naked. The man that God had ordained to be used by Him, the man that God wanted to use to defeat His enemy, had now sinned against God. This was what Adam was, and this is what all who come out of Adam are.

The Lord Jesus Offered Himself as the Lamb to be Sacrificed

Man failed God and failed Him terribly; but did God give up? No! God never gives up. Even before He created anything, even before the foundation of the world, His Son offered Himself as the Lamb (see I Peter 1:18-19). It is as if the Son said, “Father, if this is Your will, I am willing to be the Lamb. I am willing to bear the sins of the world. I am willing to die to redeem human beings in order that Your plan may be fulfilled.” Thus our Lord Jesus, the Son of God was the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. He offered Himself as the substitute for man and used His blood to cleanse us from all our sins. He gave His own life to every one of us that we may live, and not only live but fulfill God’s purpose for man. So this is exactly what happened.

In Philippians 2 it says, “He is equal with God and that is not something to be grasped at” (v. 6). That is a hint that one day the archangel Lucifer tried to be equal with God. But so far as the Son of God is concerned, He is equal with God and this is not something He has to grasp at because this is what He is originally. Yet, He emptied Himself.

The Lord Jesus had to Empty Himself of all Honor and Glory as the Son of God

When our Lord Jesus came into this world, John says that the Word became flesh and tabernacled among men, full of grace and truth (1:14). When He came to this world taking up the form of man, He had to empty Himself. Of course, He could not empty Himself of His Godhead because that is what He is. But He emptied Himself of all the honor and glory that surrounded the Godhead. God wants us to empty ourselves and how we hesitate as if we have so much to be emptied; but as a matter of fact, all we can empty is our sins. What else do we have? But think of the Son of God; He is the fullness of the Godhead. When you consider God—the glory of God, the power of God, the character of God—He is unlimited and yet He emptied Himself, not of His Godhead, but all the glory and honor surrounding the Godhead. That is really emptying.

The Lord Jesus Took the Form of a Bondslave

He was in the form of God. The form there does not refer to outward shape because the word form, icon, image is an inward quality. Yet our Lord Jesus laid aside that form which was all the honor, glory, power and authority of the Godhead. He took up another form which was the form of a bondslave. Yes, He did take upon himself the shape of a man and the shape there refers to His outward form, but the inward form, the image, is the character of God, the mightiness of God, the glory of God. What an emptying that must have been! When our Lord Jesus came into this world His emptying was real emptiness. What we are supposed to empty is nothing compared with that. How reluctant we are to empty ourselves as if we have something to be treasured. What is it? It is our sins.

The Lord Jesus Never Did or Said Anything Out from Himself

When the Lord Jesus came to the earth to be a man, He was perfect. Even though inwardly He was God, He never exercised His rights as God. Throughout His life He obeyed His Father. He said, "I cannot say anything by Myself. What I say is because I have heard My Father say it. I cannot do anything by Myself. What I do is because God has done it. I cannot go anywhere by Myself." You will remember that during a feast when our Lord's earthly brothers were going to Jerusalem to keep the feast, Jesus stayed behind. At that time, they did not believe in Him. They said, "If You want to be famous, You have to go to Jerusalem because this is the time when the people are gathered." But our Lord Jesus said, "Your time is always ready, but My time has not yet come." After His brethren left, He also left. Is there any contradiction? No. Even in that short period, He would not do anything by Himself. He waited until His Father's time had come.

Throughout His life, our Lord Jesus never did anything out from Himself. He never went anywhere by Himself nor did He ever say anything of Himself. He obeyed His Father in everything throughout His life. If it was the Father's will, He would do it.

The Scene on the Mount of Transfiguration

You will remember the scene on the Mount of Transfiguration towards the end of His earthly life. He took three of His closest disciples with Him and went up to the mountain. When they were on the mountain, our Lord transfigured Himself. Glory began to appear out from Him. His clothing became glorious, and Moses and Elijah appeared to Him. They were talking about His departure, how He would go out from this earth. It was a very intense time. So far as the Lord Himself is concerned, He had lived thirty-three years and He was absolutely ready to return to His Father. He had come to this world and proven His obedience to the Father. So far as He Himself is concerned, He was worthy to return to His Father. This is what Moses and Elijah were talking about with Him: how He would exit from the world.

Oh, every time we think of that scene, it touches our hearts. The Lord Jesus was ready to ascend to the throne. And if He did, what would happen? There would be only one Man in heaven; all of us would be finished. But thank God, He did not exit from that mountain; He did not go out. Instead, He came down from the mountain and set His face towards Jerusalem. There He went to Calvary; there He bore our sins on His body; there He accomplished the work of salvation. Every time you think of this, you can see what our Lord Jesus has done for us. It was not for your sake or my sake. It was not for Himself; it was for the Father's sake. This is our Lord Jesus.

So far as our Lord Jesus as a Man is concerned, He is the Man of God's mind. But it is for our sake that He went to the cross. What love this is! We are here because of what He has done for us. If it were not because of that, we would not be here. There is no hope. But thank God, He is our hope of glory. So our Lord Jesus not only died for us and accomplished the work of salvation, but He is resurrected and He has ascended up on high. Before He left, He told His disciples, "You go

from Jerusalem to Samaria to all Judea and even to the end of the earth to be My witness.” So this is what the Bible says about “you are My witness.”

God’s Will is for Us to be His Witnesses

We are created for God; we are redeemed for God. We should not think of living by ourselves or for ourselves. This is not the will of God. God’s will is for us to be His witness. How can we be His witness? We cannot do it on our own. But He will work in our lives to such a degree that our lives on earth will be a witness and a testimony to Himself. Thank God, we know what we are to do today. We need to give ourselves completely to Him and enable Him to work in our lives until Christ is fully formed in us and that will be our testimony.

The Great Commission

When you come to the end of the Gospel according to Matthew, we have the so-called Great Commission. What is that Great Commission? Oftentimes, we think the Great Commission is to go to the world and preach the gospel. And thank God, for centuries the church has been doing that. In other words, we think evangelism is the Great Commission. Now of course, we have to preach the gospel; but evangelism is the beginning; it is not the end. Thank God, the church has awakened and realized how they need to go to the end of the world to preach the gospel. So evangelism has become the Great Commission.

However, as you read the Great Commission, you find it is more than evangelism. Of course, evangelism is included, but that is only the beginning. What the Lord has commissioned us is much greater than that. He says, “Go ye into the world to make disciples of all the nations.” In other words, the Lord wants us to go and make *disciples* of the nations.

Today, in our mind, there seems to be a separation between believers and disciples. You can be a believer, but you wait to become a disciple because you think evangelism is everything. As long as you are saved, that is it. As one brother said, “If my two legs are within the gate of heaven, I am satisfied.” You may be satisfied, but is God satisfied? No, He has something far more than that.

Apprenticeship

The Lord Jesus said, “Go and make disciples of all nations”—not only believers, but disciples. Now of course, the disciples mentioned here are not the students in the modern sense. Today, when you become a student, you pay a fee to study. You try to absorb all the learnings of the professors, and then you graduate. This is not the idea of discipleship in the Scriptures. Discipleship is like the old-fashioned apprenticeship. In the olden days in China we did not have college as we have today. When you are growing up, you had to learn a trade, and the way to learn a trade was to have a master.

I remember my grandfather, who was the oldest son, was a builder of houses. He built the American school in Shanghai. In order to do business with foreigners, he sent my father to an American school to learn English so that he could help my grandfather in the business. But thank God, when my father was in that school, he was led to the Lord, and he believed in the Lord Jesus. When he told his parents, of course, my grandfather was very unhappy because at that time the so-called believers were trying to take advantage of foreigners; therefore, it was a disgrace to believe in the Lord Jesus. So my grandfather did not allow my father to go back to school. Instead he was to be apprenticed out. My grandfather thought that if he had no touch with the foreigners, he would be all right, but my father's faith was true. On the next day, he was to be sent out to be an apprentice, and my grandfather, my grandmother, and my father did not sleep. My father's faith was firm though, and after midnight, my grandmother's heart was softened and she said, "Let him go back to school." So my father finished school, and when he went to college, my grandfather would not support him. It took eight years for my father to finish college because he was partly studying and partly working. Thank God, his faith was firm, and gradually, my grandmother also believed. My grandfather never expressed in his life that he became a believer.

I was the grandson that he loved most because I looked like him. After I was saved, I also talked with him, and my father talked with him. Can you imagine that my grandfather was illiterate? He could not even sign his name, but he could do business with foreigners. He used Pidgin English. I will not tell you what Pidgin English is. For instance, one two in Pidgin English is banana. Banana is one, two. That is the way my grandfather talked English. We prayed for my grandfather, and sometimes, without anybody knowing it, he would go to listen to my father preaching. When he was sick, he allowed my aunt to read the Bible to him, but he would not let any stranger come in and pray for him. But we prayed for him.

When he died, he had not given any impression that he had believed in the Lord Jesus. At that time, I was already working in Hong Kong. I said, "Lord, we have been praying for my grandfather all the time as to whether he is saved or not." And this is what happened. He had a concubine. Because he was such a good man and he helped people, these people insisted that their daughter be given to him. He went to his concubine every afternoon, but in the evening, he would always come back. Now his concubine was a Buddhist, and when my grandfather died, she called a magician because she wanted to talk to my grandfather. In the olden days in China, if you wanted to talk to a dead person, you could call the magician and he would do some magic and talk to you in that person's voice. That is really devilish. But she wanted to talk to my grandfather, so the magician came and used his magic. You know what he heard? My grandfather said, "Do not call me; I do not belong to you." Thank God, I know my grandfather was saved.

Baptism

God wants us not only to be a believer but to be a disciple. A disciple is one who commits himself completely to his master. He is not only to learn from his master, but after he has been under him for a few years, he will talk and walk like his master. This is discipleship. The Lord

wants us to be like Him. We are to absorb Him in such a way that we will be like Him. And the first thing is to be baptized. Baptism means that you have come to the end of yourself. When you go under the water, you are dead; you are buried. When you come up, it is no longer you; it is Christ in you. That is baptism.

After one is baptized and has committed himself totally to the Lord, then “it is no longer I but Christ who lives in me.” Matthew 28:19-20 says, “Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” This is the Great Commission.

Shall we pray:

Dear Lord, we want to thank Thee for giving us this opportunity. Lord, Thou hast called us to be Thy disciples. Lord, we pray that we will all offer ourselves to Thee and allow Thee to work out Thy full salvation in us that we may be Thy witnesses. Oh dear Lord, do not allow any here to fail to give himself or herself to Thee. Work in each and every one of us until Christ is fully formed. Dear Lord, we want to say as Paul said, “For me to live is Christ.” May this be true of every one of us here! This is the prayer of our hearts. May glory be unto You! In Your name. Amen.