

WCCC 2005

Brother Kaung

The Way to the Eternal Purpose of God

- The Cross and the Church (1)

The Foundation of the Church

1Corinthians 2: 1 – 2, 6 – 12. And I, when I came to you brethren, came not in excellency of word, or wisdom, announcing to you the testimony of God. For I did not judge it well to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

But we speak wisdom among the perfect; but wisdom not of this world, nor of the rulers of this world, who come to nought. But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, that hidden wisdom which God had predetermined before the ages for our glory: which none of the princes of this age knew, (for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;) but according as it is written, 'Things which eye has not seen, and ear not heard, and which have not come into man's heart, which God has prepared for them that love Him', but God has revealed to us by His Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who of men have known the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Thus also the things of God knows no one except the Spirit of God. But we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we may know the things which have been freely given to us of God.

Matthew 16: 13 – 18, 21. But when Jesus has come into the parts of Caesarea-Philippi, He demanded His disciples, saying, 'Who do men say that I the Son of man am'? And they said, Some, John the Baptist; and others, Elias; and others again, Jeremias or one of the prophets. He says to them, 'but ye, who do ye say that I am'? And Simon Peter answering said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God'. And Jesus answering said to him, 'Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona, for flesh and blood has not revealed it to thee, but My Father who is in the heavens. And I also, I say unto thee that thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and Hades' gates shall not prevail against it'.

From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go away to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised.

Let us have a word of prayer:

Dear Lord, as we gather here in Thy presence, our hearts do bow in worship. How we praise and thank Thee for Thy tremendous love for us. How we praise and thank Thee for sending Thy only begotten Son to us! How we praise and thank Thee that Thou are willing to go to the cross for our sake. We acknowledge that everything comes from Thee, everything is through Thee and unto Thee. How we do desire, Lord, that Thou be glorified in the midst of Thy people. So we look to Thee that the Holy Spirit will work among us. Release Thy word to us and plant Thy word into our hearts, that it may bear fruit unto Thyself. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.

We thank God for giving us this opportunity to be together. We know we are living at the very end of this age. We do not know whether this gathering will be our last gathering before the Lord's return. It is possible, and we look forward to it. The Lord is coming soon. We love Him even though we have not seen Him, but we long to see Him face to face. But there is a problem here. Are we ready for Him? Are we prepared to meet Him? When we see Him, will we be put to shame or will we be glorified in Him? Thank God, that He still gives us this opportunity to be ready for our Lord. So to me, I feel this is a very crucial time. We cannot afford to be complacent. We have to seek Him diligently with all our hearts. This is not a time to play around; this is a time that we all need to get serious about Him. I feel there is a lack of desperation in our spirit. If we really know our time, I believe we should feel desperate. May the Lord give us that spirit, that we will really look steadfastly unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

I believe the theme of this conference is clear to everyone of us – The Way to the Eternal Purpose of God: The Cross. In the past conferences, we shared many times and in many ways on the eternal purpose of God, because to know God is to know His purpose. Our God is a God of purpose. Even before the foundation of the world, God purposed a purpose in Himself, and that purpose governs all His plans and all His ways. In other words, since eternity past, after He had purposed that eternal purpose, He has been working throughout the ages and generations for that very purpose. So you can see immediately how important, how essential is that purpose. If we miss that purpose, then our whole life will be a loss, a waste.

The Eternal Purpose of God

What is the eternal purpose of God? What is it that God has revealed to us of His heart and of His mind, this mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages in God? Thank God it has now been revealed to us through the apostles and the prophets. Today this mystery is an open secret. But even though it has been revealed and has been recorded in the word of God, yet we must receive

personal revelation from the Lord. Without that revelation, the eternal purpose of God is just a vague theory. But as the apostle Paul says, 'It has pleased God to reveal His Son in me'. When God reveals it into your heart, there is a transformation. In all spiritual things we need revelation because in ourselves there is absolutely no way to know God. So may the Lord give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation unto the full knowledge of God.

In the past our emphasis was more on this matter of revelation. How we need that heavenly vision! Before Saul, the Pharisee, saw that heavenly vision, he was groping in darkness. He wanted to serve God, but what he did was opposing God. But thank God, on the road to Damascus it pleased God to reveal His Son in him. What transformation came upon him! He became Paul the apostle. He was one who really knew the eternal purpose of God. So let us pray to the Lord that He will grant us that Spirit of wisdom and revelation, that we may really know what is the eternal purpose of God.

Of course, to put it very simply, the eternal purpose of God is none other than Christ and His church. But without revelation from above, our understanding of Christ and our understanding of the church is completely outward. It is all superficial, and it is full of errors. Only with revelation from above can we really know Christ and really know what the church is. But this time our emphasis is different. We do not mean to say that revelation is insignificant. It is the very basis, but we have gone over that so many times. Therefore, instead of emphasizing on revelation, we feel there is a need to emphasize the way.

In the letter to the Ephesians, there are two prayers that the apostle Paul prayed for the church. His first prayer is that God may grant them the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God. But then in chapter 3, he had another prayer, and the emphasis on that prayer is that we may apprehend the fulness of God. In other words, the first prayer is concerning revelation, and the second prayer is concerning the way. Revelation is heavenly, but without the way, which is the cross, it will remain in heaven. For that revelation to become reality in our lives, to be fulfilled in us, we need to find the way, and the way is none other but the way of the cross. So this is the emphasis for our time.

My assignment is the cross and the church. We will look at this matter from three different directions: the cross, the foundation of the church; the cross and the building of the church; and the cross, the testimony of the church. So by the grace of God, we want to consider the cross and the foundation of the church.

Paul's Testimony

When the apostle Paul was ready to go into Corinth, he went there to announce the testimony of God. The testimony of God is none other than what God has revealed of Himself. No one knows God. God is the greatest mystery in the universe. Unless He reveals Himself, nobody will know Him in any way. But thank God. He is the God of revelation. He is the God who reveals Himself. All

that we know of God is because of what He has revealed, nothing more. Of course, what He has revealed to us is not all that He is, because He is far beyond us. But thank God, it pleases Him to reveal Himself to us. What He reveals is His testimony, that is, He is testifying of Himself, who He is and what He is. What is His purpose? What is His way? He reveals it to us, and this is the testimony of God.

Jesus Christ and Him Crucified

The apostle Paul went to Corinth to announce the testimony of God, but in doing that he knew that he could not do it with the wisdom and the eloquence of man because this is far beyond any human capacity. So he decided that when he arrived at Corinth, he would know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. In other words, Jesus Christ and Him crucified is the only way to the testimony of God. Aside from Jesus Christ and Him crucified, there is no revelation; there is no way to the testimony of God. Jesus Christ and Him crucified is the very foundation to the testimony of God.

We know in the final days of the apostles, the city of Corinth was a cultured city. It was noted for its eloquence and for its knowledge, but it was a very corrupt and evil city. So, as the apostle Paul

contemplated announcing the testimony of God to them, he would not match his intelligence with their intelligence. He would not use his own words to try to match their words. He would announce to them Jesus Christ and Him crucified because only Jesus Christ and Him crucified could save them, could change them, could transform them. 'Jesus Christ and Him crucified.'

Today, when we hear this, probably we will think that it is very elementary. Of course we know Jesus Christ. Of course we know Him crucified, and it is because we know Him and His crucifixion we are saved. We belong to Him, and He belongs to us. This is very elementary. But within that word 'Jesus Christ and Him crucified', there is the principle to the full purpose of God. To the world, to people who are not saved, who are in sins and transgressions, they need to know Jesus Christ and Him crucified in order to be saved. But after we are saved, Jesus Christ and Him crucified is not something of the past. When we believe in Him and His cross, this is just the beginning. And if we allow Him and His cross to work in our lives, then we will be led into the eternal purpose of God.

Paul was not able to share with the Corinthians the full counsel of God. Even though by announcing to them Jesus Christ and Him crucified they got saved, yet after they were saved, they were not growing in Jesus Christ and Him crucified. They still lived by their old natural life. For this reason, Paul was not able to share with them the eternal purpose of God. But he did mention in verse 6: But among the perfect, we do talk about wisdom, the hidden wisdom of God.

The Perfect

Who are the perfect? The perfect here does not mean 'sinless perfection'. Aside from our Lord Jesus, in this world there is no one who is sinless-perfect. Only our Lord knows no sin. He has never sinned. He does not even know what sin is. Aside from Him, no one is sinless-perfect. But in the Scripture, the perfect here means 'the grown-up, the matured'. If we believe in Jesus Christ and Him crucified, not only as the means by which we are saved, but we let Jesus Christ and Him crucified continue to work in us; then we will grow; we will be more matured. And as we become more matured, then we can talk about the eternal purpose of God. We can talk about God's mystery; how His wisdom is in a hidden mystery. But when you read 1Corinthians 2, from verse 6 onwards, Paul tried to describe what God's wisdom in a mystery is. He told us that this is a wisdom that the world never knows, and this is a wisdom that man has never heard, never seen, and has never thought about. It has never been thought about because it is far beyond human possibility and it concerns us, concerns those who love God. It is something that is revealed only by the Spirit of God, and it is for our glory.

What is it? It is the church. So here you find the connection between the cross and the church. It is through the cross that the church is revealed and realized.

The Father Reveals the Son

Now we will go back to Matthew 16. We remember that our Lord Jesus went to the border of Caesarea-Philippi, which was a Gentile city. Our Lord was rejected by His own people, so He retreated to the border of a Gentile city. Then He asked His disciples a question: 'Who do men say that I the Son of Man am?' And of course, His disciples would give Him all the good reports. Some said, 'You are John the Baptist coming into life'. Others said, 'You are Isaiah'. Others said, 'You are Jeremiah because You weep a lot'; or 'You are one of the prophets'.

Then our Lord turned to His disciples again: 'Who do you think I am? You who have been with Me, who do you think I am?' And Simon Peter, as usual the spokesman among the disciples, said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God'. Our Lord immediately said to him, 'Simon, son of Jonah, you are blessed because this is not something flesh and blood can show you'. Flesh and blood can tell you He is a prophet, but it is the Father who is in heaven who has revealed His Son to you.

So no one knows our Lord Jesus but the Father and to whom the Father is pleased to reveal. Thank God, when we come to the Lord Jesus, the Father reveals His Son to us and in us. What a mercy! What a grace! What a love! Because of this revelation of the Father concerning His Son, on the basis of that revelation, our Lord Jesus said to Peter, 'You are a stone. On this rock I will

build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it'. This is the first time our Lord mentioned the word *church* while He was on earth.

Peter Is Not the Foundation

'I will build My church on this rock, and you are Peter, a stone'. What we have here is the foundation of the church. Foundation is most important to a building. Even though it is hidden, yet it is most important.

What is the foundation of the church? Some people say because the Lord said, 'You are Peter; you are a stone and on this rock I will build My church', that Peter is the foundation of the church. Thank God, Peter knew better because in 1Peter 2: 5, he said, '*Our Lord Jesus is the living stone. As we come to Him, we all become living stones and we are to be built together into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*'. So Peter is not the foundation of the church. As you read on, you will find how our Lord turned to him and said, 'Satan, get behind Me'. If Peter is the foundation, that foundation had already been shaken. We know for sure that Peter is not the foundation of the church. Nobody is the foundation of the church. Christ Jesus is the only foundation. Peter is just a little, small stone, a chip out of the rock, and our Lord Jesus is the rock. He is the sure foundation.

You remember the apostle Paul said in 1Corinthians 3, 'I am like a master builder'. Literally, it is: 'I am a foreman. I lay the foundation'. There is no other foundation that can be laid. The foundation is Jesus Christ and we are all being built upon it. What is the foundation of the church? The foundation of the church is Christ Jesus.

The Apostles

In Ephesians 2: 20 the apostle Paul says, '*The church is built upon the foundation of the apostles, and Christ Jesus is the cornerstone.*'

If you read Revelation 21, you find in the New Jerusalem there are twelve foundations and the names written on the twelve foundations are the twelve apostles of our Lord Jesus. Is there any contradiction here? We know there is none. The foundation of the church is Jesus Christ. In Ephesians and in Revelation the reason the term apostles seem to be the twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem is because we are told in Ephesians 3 that the mystery was revealed to the apostles and the prophets. In other words, today we know about our Lord Jesus through the apostles. Our Lord Jesus revealed Himself to the apostles, and the apostles delivered that revelation to us.

In 1Corinthians 11, when Paul mentioned this matter of the Lord's table, he said, 'I delivered to you what I have received from the Lord'. It was not something invented by the apostle. He received it from the Lord, and he faithfully delivered it to us.

The apostle John said in 1John, 'We fellowship with you and our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son'. So the source is the Father and the Son. The apostles do not have any teaching. The apostles do not have any personal fellowship. Their teaching is the teaching of Christ. Their fellowship is the fellowship of God's Son, Jesus Christ. So the foundation of the church is none other than Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

How the Foundation is Laid

After our Lord Jesus revealed the church to the apostles, then immediately afterwards in verse 21 in Matthew 16, it says, 'From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go away to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised'. Our Lord revealed to Peter, 'I will build My church, and it will be built on the rock'. It will be built upon Himself. Then He further revealed to His disciples that He had to go to Jerusalem. He would be rejected by the chief priests, by the scribes, and by the Pharisees. He would be killed, but on the third day He would be raised from the dead. This was the first time that our Lord Jesus began to reveal to His disciples what would happen to Him. After He had revealed the church, after He had revealed that He is the foundation of the church, then He began to explain to His disciples how this foundation is laid. He said He had to go to Jerusalem, He had to be killed, but on the third day He would be raised. Before His crucifixion there were three occasions that our Lord Jesus revealed to His disciples about His crucifixion. This was the first occasion.

In Matthew 17, after His transformation, He was in Galilee. And in Galilee, He continued to reveal to His disciples that He had to go to Jerusalem and be killed. The third occasion is in Matthew 20. On His way to Jerusalem, He again revealed to His disciples that He had to be crucified. Why is it so? Our Lord is the foundation of the church, and that foundation is the confession of Peter: 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God'. Our Lord Jesus is the Son of God. He is the eternal Son of the eternal God. He is forever the Son of God. Even after He came into this world and He called Himself the Son of Man, yet He is still the Son of God. The Father acknowledged that: 'This is My beloved Son'. That never changes. And as the Son, He was sent into this world to be Christ. Christ means 'the Anointed'. He was anointed to do a job. He was sent on a mission. So our Lord Jesus again and again said, 'There is One who sends Me; I am here not by Myself. My Father sends Me, and I must do His will'. He was sent to accomplish a work, the work of redemption. How can He accomplish that mission? He has to go to the cross. If He does not go to the cross, that mission cannot be accomplished. He will fail to be Christ. So He must go to the cross. Therefore He told His disciples, 'You acknowledge Me as the Christ, the foundation of the church. Now let me tell you how I am going to fulfill My mission that I may truly be the Christ. I have to go to the cross. There is no other way'.

Without the Cross – No Christ

Without the cross, we have no Christ because He cannot accomplish His purpose. Thank God, our Lord Jesus not only came into this world, He was equal with God, but He emptied Himself. He cannot empty Himself of His deity, because that is what He is. But He emptied Himself of all the glory and honor around deity – His place, His power, His authority. He emptied Himself of all these things in order to be a Man and the form was the form of a bondservant; that is to say, He had no right of anything. He was obedient to the Father, even unto death.

We thank God for sending His Son into this world. His incarnation is a great mystery. We thank God for sending His Son into this world to live for thirty-three years. On the Mount of Transfiguration when Moses and Elijah talked with Him about His exodus, He could easily exit from that mountain to the throne because He had lived a perfect life. He had lived a life that is the Man in God's heart. He was worthy to return, but He refused to return. He came down from the mountain and He went to Jerusalem and went to the cross. It is for our sake.

Christ crucified is absolutely necessary to our Lord Jesus. Without that He cannot be Christ. And you know how Satan tried to persuade Him from the cross. He was tempted forty days in the wilderness by Satan: 'You do not need to go to the cross. All You need to do is jump from the temple and let everybody see You descending, and they will all believe in You'. Our Lord rejected that. That was not the way for His exodus. Even at the last minute, Satan tried to use His beloved disciple to dissuade Him from going to the cross. But our Lord knew better.

First of all, the cross is necessary for our Lord Jesus. If we proclaim a cross-less Christ, there is no salvation. But more than that, when our Lord Jesus went to the cross, He was there for six hours. From nine o'clock in the morning to twelve o'clock noon, we found that He was surrounded by His enemies. Not only did the priests and the people mock Him, even the robbers who were crucified with Him mocked Him, and in the darkness in a hidden way, the enemy was surrounding Him. He suffered tremendously not only physically but mentally. But thank God, His Father was with Him. Then at twelve o'clock, the sun was darkened. From twelve o'clock to three o'clock, it was not man who rejected Him and crucified Him, it was not just Satan trying to destroy Him; His own Father, whom He loved from eternity, turned His face against Him.

In Isaiah 53 it says, 'Jehovah, God crushed Him'. And that was the time when He cried out, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' He did not say, 'My Father'. When He was first crucified, He said, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do'. The Father was with Him. But now God, the God of the universe, the holy God, the righteous God crushed Him, because there He became a sin offering. He who knew no sin was made sin for us. He could not bear it; He cried out. And the Father could not bear it, so He turned His face –

the love of God. Thank God, our Lord Jesus suffered eternal death for us during those three hours, separated from God. That is eternal death; but He was willing for us that we may be saved. Before He passed away, He said, 'It is finished!' The work of redemption is done. Christ had fulfilled His mission and He gave His Spirit back to His Father. In other words, the Father had received Him back.

Because the next day was a great Sabbath, no one who was cursed and hanged should be there. So the soldiers came. Usually when a person is crucified, it is a lingering death. They came to make sure that those who were crucified were dead or make dead. The two robbers were still living, so they broke their legs to speed them to death. But when they came to the Lord, they saw that He was already dead. But to make sure He was dead, a soldier thrust his spear into His side and out of it came blood and water. And the apostle John was there; he saw it and he bore witness to it.

The Material for the Church

In John 19 he said, 'I saw it. I saw blood and water come out. I bear witness to it and my witness is true'. Why is it that John was so emphatic on this fact? Because out of His broken heart came the last drop of blood and it had already disintegrated – blood and water. What is the meaning of it? The blood and water that came out of the side of our Lord is the material for the building of the house of God. Blood is for the remission of sin; water is the giving of His life to us. He poured out His life like water.

These are the materials for the building of the church. The church is not built with you and me. The church is built with the blood and water in you and me. The material for the building of the house is Christ Himself in you and in me. It is not you and me; it is Christ in you and me. It is His blood that washes away all our sins, that clears up all the things that are against God, and it is His life poured out into us. This becomes the building material of the church.

So we find that the cross is necessary for our Lord Jesus because without it, He cannot fulfill His mission as Christ. On the contrary, He will be our condemnation instead of our justification, because He is the only one who lived a perfect life. But thank God, He was willing to go to the cross for our sake. And from the very cross of Christ comes the material for the building of the church. I believe we need to see this very clearly. What is the church? Many people think the church is the stone building or brick building or even the wood building around the corner of the street. I believe we know better. We know this is not the church.

The Cross Eliminates All that is Not Christ

What is the church? We say the church is those who are saved, because church means the 'called-out ones gathered together'. So we are the called-out ones and we gather together. So that is the church. In other words, we are the church. Now in one sense that is true, but in the strictest sense it is not true.

The church is not you and me. There is you and me, but the church is not built with that. The church is built with that which comes out of Christ because only that which comes out of Christ can return to Christ. The church is a living body. It rejects all foreign elements. So what is not of Christ will be rejected. Only what is of Christ can be joined into the body of Christ. I think this is a very important principle we need to hold on to.

The problem with the church today is not outside. It is not outward persecution. Fact tells us the more persecution the stronger the church. The problem of the church is you and me. Are you seeking for a perfect church? Some people say that if you are there, there is no perfect church. That is very true. We are the problem because we in our natural life are a foreign element. In the living church of the living God, it will be rejected. That is why we say again and again that the cross needs to so work in us that it will eliminate all that is not of Christ. Only what remains of Christ will be built into the living church of God. The cross is not only a necessity to Christ; the cross is a necessity to every one of us. His cross gives us the strength to bear our cross. So after all it is from Him, through Him and unto Him.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, our hearts are deeply moved by Thy love. Who are we that Thou art willing to go to the cross for us? Sometimes, Lord, we wonder if it is worthwhile. Thou hast done so much for us, but where are we? We pray that Thy Spirit will search our hearts. Do not spare us. May Thy cross be transplanted into us and deliver us from ourselves, that Thy eternal purpose may be fulfilled in us. Dear Lord, forgive us for delaying Thy return. Come quickly, Lord Jesus. In Thy precious name we pray. Amen.