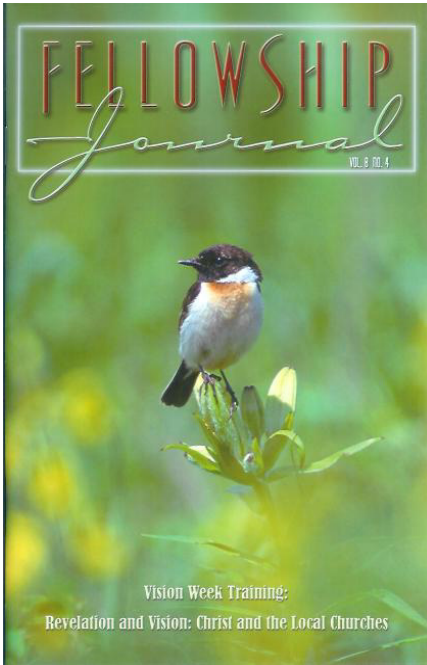


FELLOWSHIP *Journal*

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Contents

Vision Week Training:

The Revelation and Vision of Christ and the Local Churches

James to Peter to Paul
to John

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Introduction

From July 6 to July 11, a number gathered at Ashland Woods near Sullivan, Ohio, for a time of training. During that time Titus Chu shared on the matter of revelation and vision, and the Lord's desire to impart such a scene to all His believers so that they might serve Him as those regulated by the revelation of Jesus Christ and the local churches. What is contained here conveys the primary focus of the time, which concerned the nature of revelation, the development of ministries, and the content of the revelation granted to John on the Island of Patmos.

This issue of the Fellowship Journal contains content from the first eight messages given by Titus during this time. The last three messages which focus upon the book of Revelation itself and the Lord's address to the seven churches will be presented in a future issue.

NOTICE

Beginning with this issue, the Fellowship Journal will become a quarterly rather than a bi-monthly. The next anticipated date of issuance will be October of this year.

Vision Week

MESSAGE ONE

APOKALUPSIS, HORAMA & OPTASIA (1)

In the Bible, the Greek words *horama* and *optasia* are both typically translated as vision, but a distinction can be made. This is why, rather than “Revelation and Visions,” the outline for these messages is entitled “*Apokalupsis, Horama and Optasia*”. (The final book in the Bible normally referred to as Revelation is also referred to as the *Apocalypse*, after the Greek.)

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE — THE MOST ATTRACTIVE LIFE

A Christian life is much more attractive than a worldly life. I have lived this life for many years now, and I have really come to appreciate it. Unlike so many other lives, my life has not been wasted. Others may have had more talent or may have possessed a greater soul, but because they did not give their lives to Christ, their lives have ultimately not produced anything of true value. They wasted what the Lord gave them. By the Lord’s mercy, our lives do not have to go to waste! People are deceived if they think the Christian life is a religious life. There can be no life that is more colorful or romantic than the life of one who follows Jesus. Do not consider that the Christian life is a boring life spent in meetings! The Christian truly knows how to enjoy everything the Lord has provided for mankind’s enjoyment. Once sinful and distracting things are removed from consideration, there still remain many things a Christian may enjoy. A Christian should take hourly, daily and even weekly vacations. A Christian can travel with the Lord or enjoy a time of fellowship and music. Such times enrich the Christian life. Every day we can take a vacation by fellowship or by enjoying something the Lord provides. Taking advantage of such opportunities even enables us to see spiritual things afresh. The setting we have here is good for seeing something this week!

Spiritual progress does not come about in the same way that educational progress does. You cannot learn spiritual things in school, nor do you need spiritual understanding to learn what human society teaches. What is taught in human society is easily absorbed. Christians live for eternity, while those who are not believers live only for a time. Thus there are two totally different viewpoints regarding human existence. The matter that decides this is revelation. People without revelation end up living peculiar lives, for they seek after things without any realization of what their lives are for. They end up using all their efforts to gain things such as power or riches. Due to revelation, however, Christians realize their lives are for something totally different. (Religions such as Buddhism or Islam can be grasped with the mind, but the mind alone cannot apprehend spiritual things. If someone wants to say we are part of a religion called Christianity, he needs to know then that Christianity is different from any other so-called religion, for it is a matter of revelation!) Since living as a Christian is a matter of revelation, the Christian must realize he or she cannot live by the mind alone. As Christians, we **MUST** have revelation or we will not be able to spiritually grow or develop. Apart from revelation, no one can follow Christ. Every step of the Christian life is a step of revelation.

Unfortunately, most of those of the second generation know “spiritual” things only as matters of tradition rather than revelation. They “believe” because their parents believe and their children have no reason to see things otherwise. They have learned and observed things, but only incidentally. They have not seen for themselves. This is why many, when they reach a certain age, question whether or not what they have grown up with is really valid. In high school, they may wonder whether Jesus Christ is truly the unique Savior. In college, they may wonder whether the church life is really the unique way God desires. This is because at that point, they really are beginning to face their lives. For the first time, they realize they are being presented with many choices. They claimed they loved Jesus, but that was before the offers of other futures became available to them. Once someone genuinely receives a revelation of Christ as their Savior, however, that person truly becomes a follower of Christ. Such a person is also able to advance spiritually by means of further revelation.

The person who says, “I must have my own future,” only does so because they are short of revelation. The person who has truly seen Christ says, “Christ must be my future!”

When someone sees Christ and the church and begins to long after Christ, he or she begins to experience something like the human experience of dating. When people begin to date, they just want to be with the person who has become the object of their desire. As they are in the presence of that person, more and more about that person becomes unveiled to them. Our revelation concerning Christ should always be advancing from one level to another. It is this progress that makes the Christian life so exciting. This is why the Christian life never gets old. I have loved the Lord for over fifty years, and yet I still feel as though I am dating Him. After more than fifty years, I realize there is still so much more of that marvelous Person I have not yet seen.

When a young man dates a young lady, his initial impressions may be that she is beautiful and pleasant. Eventually he may realize that she loves him, and his feeling will be that it is good enough for them to get married. After marriage, however, that man begins to see even more regarding his wife, and is surprised! Then the love that man has for her is tested, and the Lord must come in to give him the strength to love in spite of such new “revelations”. That, however, is the experience of dating among fallen human beings. The only kind of courtship that remains delightful is the courtship that goes on between the believer and the Savior. In my 56 years of loving the Lord, He continues to be more and more attractive and grand to me, and thus I have been continually able to pursue Him. Every time I think I finally have grasped it all, I discover there is still much more! This is the very reason the Christian life is so beautiful. There simply is no end to the Wonder that is Christ. As we pursue Him we no doubt will experience some frustrations, but we will pass through them as we continue to receive revelation of the marvelous heavenly “scenery”. And, by means of the very element we receive through the process of revelation, we ourselves will change.

THE MORE WE SEE, THE MORE WE ARE TRANSFORMED

I used to get upset more easily, but it seems I have lost my ability to lose my temper towards others, particularly towards the saints. Others sometimes take advantage of my increased tolerance, but as I have developed a greater appreciation of Christ and the saints, I can tolerate more. While some may think this is a matter of mellowing with age, I believe I would simply be an illogical, bitter old man if I did not have Christ. Year after year, season after season, Christ has become new to me. I feel I have never seen Christ, Christ’s strength, Christ’s love, Christ’s grandness, or Christ’s economy as much as I do now. Due to revelation and vision, the Christian life is a marvelous life!

APOKALUPSIS - REVELATION

Apokalupsis denotes unveiling, or revelation. (The final book of the Bible takes this word as its title.) Revelation spontaneously regulates the life of the one who receives it. Genuine believers are not regulated by regulations; genuine believers are regulated by revelation!

No one determines to love someone and then ends up falling in love with that person. Instead, after you see a certain someone, for some reason your desire for that person regulates your life to the point you simply must *marry* that person. (This is why most match-making efforts fail; no matter how good a “match” two young people appear to be, apart from ‘*apokalupsis*’ it simply does not work!)

THE RESULT OF REVELATION: DESIRE FOR CHRIST

What do we mean by revelation? The revelation we refer to is that Jesus appears to us in such a way that we feel we must have Him. In no other way could we truly declare with all the other Jesus-lovers, “I love Jesus!” Why is it that some in a congregation can declare this and really mean it, while others can only declare it because they feel they are supposed to? It is because some have seen Him and thus really love Him, while others have not yet really seen Him. These who have seen Jesus are those who find their lives regulated to the point that they must gain Him above all else. Why is this? It is because in their hearts, they have received an *apokalupsis*, a revelation with substance.

Young, unmarried brothers are always looking around and considering the various available sisters. This is normal. A brother may appreciate different sisters, but when he sees a certain one, for some reason she becomes the one that begins to regulate his life. He can talk for hours with that sister on the phone, and it seems as if no time has passed at all, for *apokalupsis* has taken place. Likewise, after we experience such an *apokalupsis* of Jesus we are able to tell Him, “I give my life to You!” No one who wants to pursue Christ can be devoid of *apokalupsis*, for apart from the experience of *apokalupsis*, there can be no pursuing of Christ. Until we experience *apokalupsis*, we can never be more than a church-goer. (This has its value, though, because it is often in the meetings that revelation of Christ is imparted. The value of your Christian life, however, will not be determined by how many meetings you go to; the value of your Christian life will be determined by how attracted you are to Christ! Our Christian life can be summed up by how strongly we can say, “Lord, I see You.”)

After I was saved on January 1, 1953, I began attending the meetings and was in the church life as a “good” brother. I eventually fell away. After the Lord granted me to really see Him in 1954, however, I could no longer go back to merely being a “good” Christian, for I had become a JESUS LOVER. My life became for whatever Christ desired. My thought was no longer of Christian duty. After seeing Him, I was often in tears before the Lord, telling Him, “You must have the pre-eminence in every part of my life. I want to serve You. I want to pursue You.” At that point, my Christian life became real. I was attracted, and my life became attractive. Before that point, though, my Christian life was not that real.

KEEPING THE LIFE-LONG POTENCY OF OUR REVELATION OF CHRIST

Even so, if we are not careful, the vision that initially regulates us can lose its potency in our lives. Our Christian life advances only as our experience in revelations advances. In Peter’s, John’s and Paul’s cases, we can see that what they testified at the beginning, they were also able to testify at the end...they saw Jesus. Their focus was never on developing a work or being successful or famous. Peter was given a revelation of Christ and could say, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!” According to their reports, people were seeing many other spiritual men in place of Christ (Elijah, John the Baptist, etc.). Peter, however, received a revelation of who Christ was! I don’t believe he really knew in full what he was talking about at that moment, but that revelation was with him his entire life. Jesus was very happy when Peter indicated he had seen who He was, and told Peter that it was His Father in the heavens who had unveiled (or revealed, verb form of *apokalupsis*) this to him. That was the beginning of Peter’s real Christian life, and it is the beginning of ours. We may only be clear to a certain point, but that initial revelation gives the Lord the ground He needs to come in and build upon it further. The Lord’s proclamation is that He will build His church upon this “rock”! At the end of Peter’s life, in 2 Peter 1:16, he could declare that he had not given “cunningly devised fables” to others. What he preached was what he had seen of Christ.

Christians often speak of Christ in the way of fables, meaning they speak of Christ without the reality of Christ. Something mystical or miraculous that people relate to Christ may replace Christ as our Christian focus, but we must always be brought back to Christ Himself. He Himself must regulate our Christian life, yet this requires that He becomes unveiled to us!

ATTRACT OTHERS WITH THE CHRIST YOU HAVE SEEN:
ACCEPT NO SUBSTITUTES SUCH AS MIRACLES

Christ's death and resurrection are the greatest "miracles" for us to experience. Too often people are distracted from these things to how someone's arthritis is healed, or how the teacher tested someone on a page they happened to study (making it seem the Lord encourages laziness). Peter could say, "we have not passed on to you cunningly devised fables". Peter did not attempt such a thing so as to attract followers. Instead, he could declare, "We are eyewitnesses of His majesty"! That revelation was a revelation of Christ and the church. John likewise could declare in his old age, "We beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and reality" (John1:14). He is surely referring to the same experience (in this case, the revelation of Christ upon the mountain). Their entire lives were regulated by that revelation. In their old age they were still able to testify, "We beheld His glory". What they had seen remained real to them throughout their entire lives. Once we receive it, revelation is something we should abide in.

OUR LIFE MUST BE A LIFE OF
"OPTASIAS" AND "APOKALUPSES" OF THE LORD

The revelation we receive should become enlarged and enhanced throughout our Christian life. After the revelation becomes the controlling element in your life, it continues on ever-increasing. Paul received the revelation concerning Christ and the church on the way to Damascus, and later spoke of both visions (*optasia*) and revelations (*apokalupsis*) (2 Cor. 12:1). From that "great light," so much was able to develop due to his faithfulness to the "heavenly vision". That was Paul's boast.

If we only know how to do things in the way of entertainment, our vision will disappear. If this happens to you and you do not know how to "re-start," YOU will disappear. I hope some will be faithful. They are those to whom I speak. Peter, John and Paul were able to say, "My life is this." Such are those able to experience and work here on earth according to what the Lord has revealed.

- Titus Chu (Ashland Woods, July 6, 2009 AM)

Vision Week

MESSAGE TWO

APOKALUPSIS, HORAMA & OPTASIA (2)

Once your life becomes regulated by revelation (*apokalupsis*), your experience should be one of continuing experiences of strengthening or encouraging visions (*horama*) until you see something more broad (*optasia*). The Lord desires that our lives would be lived according to the *apokalupsis* He has shown us. To this end, He provides us with *horama* and *optasia*. Eventually it is *optasia* that we see.

Many people want to come to the United States because they have received a kind of revelation concerning America by means of the American movies or other forms of media. When I was young I saw some movies that were set in America, and what I saw made me want to go to America, because I received a “revelation” as I watched those movies! There was one in particular I remember. To me, America seemed fabulous. When I was a teen, the movies I saw made it seem money could just be picked up off the streets and used to buy a steak dinner. (Hollywood’s projected image of the United States is one that fits the flesh of nearly every kind of person worldwide.) When I came to America and finally ordered a steak, I really learned what a steak was, and how it should be ordered. Eventually I could even tell others just arriving from Taiwan, “This is how you order a steak. It is not blood you see, but juice! And eating raw vegetables is not as barbaric as you may think. Add this salad dressing.” I could do this because I not only had the *apokalupsis* of America, but also the *optasia*. As I lived in America over the years, I came to appreciate the many things that make America... America. This is the experience of “visions upon visions upon visions”. And, as I enjoyed the things of America, I became Americanized!

REVELATION IS SUBSTANTIATED BY VISION THAT LEADS TO FURTHER EXPERIENCE

The more I have travel within America, the more I realize what a beautiful country this is. Americans themselves are what provide this country its beauty. They tend

to be very considerate and approachable. The more you are in America, the more you like it in spite of its warts and the more you become American; you cannot help it. The Christian life is the same. As we hear (or see) more in particular about how Christ loves us and how He has died for us and how much He has in store for us, the more we enter into the heavenly realm, and the more this realm opens to us, entrancing us.

In the physical, human realm, how many scenes pass before us to captivate our attention! Just from the computer alone, how much can pass through a person of which is either healthy or unhealthy! That “box” alone produces views which can captivate a person. Many different cultures can boast of many different attractions, but America stands out to nearly all people of all cultures. Until someone begins to be among the people here, however, they cannot truly understand the United States. (Even the most “crooked” Americans, when compared to those of other cultures, are pretty nice!) If you live, dress, eat, and walk *among* Americans, eventually you will begin to live, dress, eat, and walk *like* an American, and you will *become* American! The vision leads and guides you practically into such a life. Spiritually, this process is called transformation. Initially, Christ seems far from us. The more you abide in what you see of Christ, however, the more you become Christ! Christ lives in you and is magnified and expressed through you. The more you see of Christ, the more you are possessed by Him. This is because of visions and revelations you receive concerning Him.

How sad that so many who have begun in Christ have ended up living according to religious tradition and regulation. The most boring life is a life of tradition. Whatever is of traditional is not something fresh of Christ!

A LIFE LIVED IN REVELATIONS AND VISIONS IS A GLORIOUS LIFE

Once you have a view of Christ, your life’s journey may not appear so different outwardly, yet it is indeed the most glorious, fascinating, and heavenly life. Eventually you will not be able to believe that your life takes the turns it does, or produces what it produces. Among my old college classmates, no one became a great contributor to society, even though our class contained the top students in Taiwan. When I heard one of my classmates who had gained some notoriety had died, it caused me to become very sober. I realized that I seemingly had nothing compared to all of them when they began their careers, yet who among them had lived a life like I had? None. I realized deeply at the moment how glorious it was that I had followed Jesus. In spite of the fact I did not deserve it, I had lived the kind of life none of them could boast of. Since then, my realization of this has only deepened. The older you are, the more you can sense the glory.

Young men have nothing waiting for them but dreams, while old men have nothing left to them but memories. A lover of Jesus who lives according to visions and revelations can say that every year and every step taken is precious.

An older brother who has faithfully followed the Lord can testify he does not live on memories, but rather on what is yet coming, during which time he will receive more visions and revelations. He expects to see more of Christ, enjoy more of the heavenly supply and enjoy more of the heavenly things. What a life is this! This is why the Bible uses these three words (*apokalupsis, horama, optasia*). What you see should dominate your life as you receive visions upon visions and revelations upon revelations.

A VISION OF PARTICULAR AND SPECIFIC SIGNIFICANCE: HORAMA

Horama is vision that involves a particular or distinct sight. Whether or not this sight is by eye or spirit, no one can say. (In 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, Paul testified he could not say whether the revelations he received were in the body or out of the body. Paul was unique in this regard, for he could claim he had gone both to the third heavens and down to the paradise in Hades.) One characteristic of a vision is that you cannot really define how it happened, but neither can you deny you truly saw what you were given to see. Because you have seen it, it becomes to you a *vision*.

VISIONS SHOULD NOT BE CONFUSED WITH MIRACLES

Many times we love the Lord because of miracles. The value of this type of thing is not high, however. In fact, it may hurt you because you may feel you should ask the Lord to deliver you by such miracles as well, and you will refuse to receive what the Lord has arranged. Thus, you will not be able to grow as you should through what He has arranged. You should be directed by the vision you have received rather than miracles.

VISION ENABLING A PERSON TO EVEN BE MARTYRED FOR THE SUBSTANCE OF THE VISION

Those who are martyred for the Lord, however, can produce something through their martyrdom. To be a martyr requires a certain constitution. To be qualified you have to be one who has seen visions all your life. Even if you are not martyred, however, you can have such a spirit. Who today is going to kill you for being a Christian? It is not too easy to be martyred these days, but it is easy to compromise rather than having a spirit of martyrdom. If you stand firm for the Lord and His interest, however, no one has to kill you. If you are willing to sacrifice everything for the Lord's sake, something will be produced. But how easy it is to fall into compromise! Learn to have a spirit of martyrdom. Tell the Lord you want to stand firm with Him. Then you will be able to see the Lord do so many things to His glory. To be such, however, you must have *horama* and *optasia*! It is significant that the ministry of James the apostle (not to be confused with the brother of Jesus), who was one of the four apostles to see Jesus transfigured, was a ministry of martyrdom. He was the first apostle to be martyred for the Lord.

PETER'S HORAMA UPON THE ROOFTOP CONCERNING THE GENTILES

The recorded instances of *horama* Peter received had to do with the Gentiles' need to be saved, and Peter's need not to fear. He had received the revelation of Christ from the Father and that of the church from Christ in Matthew 16, and he received the keys to the kingdom of the heavens at that time. For the Jews he was able to do this on the day of Pentecost, but for the Gentiles he was not able to, so he received a *horama* to strengthen him as he was praying on a housetop (Acts 10:9-10,17,19). His response to the vision of unclean beasts he was commanded to eat was, "Not so, Lord...this is not according to my practice!" This is the reason why so many have failed. Isn't this so often our own response? (If we choose to act as though we have heard the Lord at all!) When we receive a specific command of the Lord, do we usually tell the Lord, "OK!"? Too often we say, "Not so, Lord!" and give Him many very good reasons for disobeying. In fact, instead of going to preach to the Gentiles, Peter preached to the Lord! (If you think you are more obedient, it is because you haven't had enough opportunities to fail. We proclaim things before the Lord as if we are heroes, not realizing how easily we would fail if the Lord were to call upon us to do something outside our comfort zone.) After his initial refusal, however, Peter did as the Lord asked. Learn to reverse yourself, like Peter did, regardless how you may have acted at first.

Why did Peter need such a vision, and we do not? We have much more truth in the form of God's Word than Peter had. We are clear today that everyone deserves the gospel, but that wasn't so clear to Peter in Acts 10. This is why Peter needed this particular *horama*, and we do not! We have a much fuller realization of how a Christian can walk.

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS UPON THE MOUNT

What Peter, James and John saw on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured before them was referred to by Jesus as a *horama*. (This word, however, is never used by John when speaking of his own experience.) That very particular and distinct sight should have strengthened and encouraged them. John was able to abide in that vision all his life, as he testified in John 1:14 ("we have seen His glory, glory as of the Only-Begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth").

PAUL'S HORAMA AT DAMASCUS CONCERNING ANANIAS

In Acts 9:12, Paul received *horama* regarding a man coming to him. Through this experience, Paul saw something of the local church. On the road to Damascus, a great light came, and the Lord told him, in effect, "The Stephen you killed is Me!" After participating in the killing of Stephen, Paul was possessed with the killing spirit. When Jesus appeared to him, he was "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1). Jesus told him, however, that whenever he persecuted one of His believers, he was persecuting Him. In this comment, Paul

was given to see the organic Body of Christ. In other words, Christ and His believers are one. (Before you see this, you may love Jesus and be isolated, or you may love the Body so you can enjoy being with others. After you see this, however, you realize that the more you are with the saints, the more you are with Christ, and the more you are with Christ, the more the saints are built up, for Christ and the saints are one!)

Paul, after asking the Lord's identity, followed by asking, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" The Lord was wise. He knew if He told Paul what to do, Paul would go into high gear to fulfill that mission. Therefore He told Paul to go to someone in Damascus where he would be told what to do. (Zealous young saints often wish older saints would simply tell them what to do so they could just do it!) Paul quickly requested what it was the Lord wanted him to do, and the Lord, being prepared for this, told him to go into the city where someone would tell him what to do.

After seeing the great light, Paul found out he had become blind. He was led by the hand into Damascus, where he fasted and prayed for three days. During those three days he did not even drink any water! During that time he saw a man coming to him in a vision. He did not see a great man, but a common man. His name is only mentioned here in the New Testament; we never hear of him again.

During his blindness he continued on under the influence of that great light, for during that time he realized so much. I believe during his time of prayer, much became clear. For instance, the glowing, angelic face of Stephen as he declared that he saw the Son of Man standing at the Father's right hand (Acts 6:15; 7:55) must have matched the heavenly sight Paul saw on the road. As he was sightless, under that great light I believe he repented of many things. Could he have been more wrong? He had been trying his best to persecute Christ, thinking he was pleasing God by doing so. How blind He was! And as he was in just that condition, praying and repenting without food or water, he saw a man coming to him in a vision. When a man laid his hands upon him and his sight was restored, he saw the very same man he had seen in his *horama* (Acts 9:12). That man, Ananias, told him he had come to open his eyes and to tell him he would be filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17). Now Paul saw that the Body Christ spoke of was to be found in localities. That common brother brought Christ to him in Damascus, and he became clear. The first part of that seeing was heavenly, and the second was earthly; it was of a simple man who came to him in Damascus. This reveals to us that no matter how great the vision is that we have received, we must live among the brothers!

You may wish Christ would show you something great from the heavens, but would you be able to handle such a vision? If He appeared to you and declared you were to be sent out as the next great evangelist of the 21st century, wouldn't you feel you were a great superman? This is why the Lord hates to tell you anything directly, yet is very happy to allow the brothers to tell you what to do. The Lord arranged that a seemingly unremarkable fellow-believer should tell Paul what to do. Because it came from another servant, then who was Paul but likewise such a household servant? He was just another brother among the brothers. That *horama* was the beginning of all the *horamas* Paul received.

Paul saw another *horama* for the fulfillment of his second gospel mission. It was regarding a Macedonian man who appeared to Paul after he had been traveling through Asia Minor (Acts 16:9-10). This resulted in Paul's entering into Europe. Paul also received a *horama* when the Lord told him not to be afraid (Acts 18:9).

We may say that *horama* thus leads, strengthens, and burdens us. It is not a matter of superstition. The miraculous things are no longer that necessary today. We realize the operation of the Triune God, the preciousness of the indwelling Spirit, and that the Word is with us, and so on. Miracles have become less crucial.

INSTANCES OF HORAMA PRODUCING OPTASIA

Optasia is a vision with scenery. Those who come to the United States sometimes hear they should visit the Statue of Liberty and so on. But you have to live in the United States to gain the full appreciation of what America is. It is not possible if you are merely a tourist. The United States is so much more than its novelties! I have received an *optasia* of the United States. I see this country in its decency and its opportunities. In this respect, this is a beautiful country. Any good thing can happen to any person in this country, as long as he or she abides by its laws. You cannot appreciate such a thing, however, unless you really live here after coming from a place where such things as Americans have do not exist.

Do we see this with the Lord? Or do we merely see the novel aspects contained in the New Testament? We must see Christ and the church, lest we end up being caught up with the things so many Christians end up bragging about in their congregations.

Those who are faithful to *horama* should also receive *optasia*. This is most clearly seen in Paul's experience. When Paul testified, his word was that he had not been disobedient to the heavenly *optasia*. All the aspects he had seen became to him a scene to him, and continued advancing.

For some reason when we pray or consider the Lord, an impression comes in, which is the vision. That in turn results in a spiritual perception in the inner understanding of our renewed mind, or *nous*. That in turn results in some spiritual application in our daily life. Whatever you hear of the spiritual realm remains hidden to you until you see it in spirit. It is by spiritual vision that spiritual matters become clear. Otherwise, all we can have is "tea fellowship" over terms we have learned. Once we receive a revelation and visions of Jesus, however, we can no longer live as we did before, for we become regulated in so many aspects of our lives.

- Titus Chu (Ashland Woods, July 6, 2009 PM)

Vision Week

MESSAGE THREE

THE ADVANCEMENT OF MINISTRIES (1)

THE PREREQUISITE OF MARTYRDOM

Martyrdom can be seen in figure in marriage, for in order to marry, you must be willing to submit yourself to the other person totally. Each party must be prepared to give themselves fully to the other party. For the sake of the other, each must be willing to deny themselves. To live the marriage life and to raise up a healthy family requires martyrdom. Good parents will pay any price necessary to insure that their children thrive. This equals martyrdom.

What does it mean to die for Christ? Presently, it is not likely we will be killed because we are Christians. The husband of a family, however, must take such a stand, to die for his wife and family. It may not mean he actually dies, but he has to be willing to pour himself out and work hard day and night to provide for his wife and children's happiness. Every marriage should begin with such a preparedness for martyrdom. Once the girl becomes the "substance" to the man (as his "revelation"), he needs to be prepared for that life. For the wife it should be the same. You cannot enter marriage thinking there will be no such commitment. It is a very sober matter; Christians should have no thought of divorce as a possibility. They should simply have the mind to die; to give themselves for the other party. There can be no self-claim. It is the same in following the Lord. Our existence is for the Lord, that He would be made happy.

THE ADVANCE OF MINISTRIES:

ALL MINISTRIES ARE REALIZED UPON THE BASIS OF MARTYRDOM

The first thing the husband does is find a place for his family to live. It is the same when considering the advance of the ministries. Once the

principle of martyrdom is established, the first thing a husband must do is to find something very basic for the family to live in. Peter accomplished this through his ministry. The Husband then labors to find all kinds of “riches” to decorate the “house” to make it more pleasant, satisfying and “homey”. (I speak not about the physical, outward things, of course, but I speak spiritually.) Paul represents this advancement in ministry. He labored to make everything rich for the family, both for those born and for those not yet born. Peter represents the initial preparation of the house and Paul, its building up through enrichment. What aspect does John represent? He represents the care for those for whom this is all about: the children. The focus of the husband and the wife and the reason they prepare a home is for the care of all their children. The house should become something filled with life and the exhibition of life! And that is what is represented by John’s ministry. By this point, it is evident the situation with this household is marvelous. This is exactly what the Lord is after.

So when we say, “Lord, I love You,” we should realize that is the equivalent of saying “I do,” which, as we have said, means “I am ready to die for You!” (Hasn’t the Lord already died for *us*?) The Lord says, “When you give yourself to Me, do you not realize I gave Myself for you? Now I desire that you would experience the same stand. Are you willing to live and die for Me? Are you able to live every part of your living in the principle of death on behalf of Me?”

If you are at a university, you should bring that into service to the Lord rather than simply use it as others outside of this “marriage” do. To serve and follow the Lord involves absolute commitment. The Lord has given us revelations (*apokalupsis*). He begins our life with revelations (Peter) and ends it with revelations (John). In the midst of the process of revelations He will give us *horamas* that will result in *optasia*. These visions will become the substance, reality and enjoyment of our human existence. But until what we see becomes a part of our constitution (by means of martyrdom), what we see will not be ours in FULL, but only in part.

You may see the *horama* and *optasia*, but it does not become a ministry until it becomes RICH in you. Possessing a ministry is not really a matter of behavior, but a matter of who you are. When you are constituted with Christ, your speaking, your fellowship and your doing will just be Christ. This is marvelous. From *apokalupsis* and from *horama* and from *optasia*, ministries are formed that fulfill God’s eternal purpose. As we grow older, we should become more constituted so that we might become those who are able to dispense what is constituted in us to others. Through the years, we should experience all the revelations and visions we are given to see. As we do, something is constituted in us, and this constitution becomes something others can receive from also. If we do not develop such a constitution within, however, we have nothing of value to give to others. It is like some-

one who lives in America and sees things in America and *almost* becomes an American, but does not. When what you see becomes your constitution, that means you possess something to minister. To minister is not a matter of voice; it is a matter of person. What I do is not my behavior; what I do is *me!* When you are constituted with Christ, then your speaking and doing will simply be Christ. By means of *apokalupsis*, *horama* and *optasia*, the Lord desires that ministries would develop that might carry out His desire on the earth.

The older we become, the more the Lord desires that we would become dispensers of His riches rather than merely their recipients. As we pursue the Lord by means of all the revelations and visions, we should become constituted to the point that we can begin to dispense unto others what we have gained and been constituted with. What you dispense is your ministry.

EACH MINISTER'S MINISTRY IS NECESSARY; NONE CAN "REPLACE" ANOTHER

No one can be (or should be) the "superman" in the church life. No one should feel bothered if someone does something and seems to steal away some opportunity to shine. Peter is Peter, John is John, and Paul is Paul. Each is different, each has his part, each is necessary and each is to be appreciated. Each played a critical part at a particular stage. For instance, if Peter had not provided the "house," all the "furniture" Paul provided would have been ruined; if neither had done their part, all the "children" John produced would have had no home to run around in! For this we should worship the Lord. He has raised up ministers who each play a necessary role. Thus, there is no competition among them.

OUR GOAL: TO DEVELOP OUR MINISTRY SO CHRIST CAN BE SATISFIED

The top human life is a life satisfying God according to this normal, healthy process. The beginning of this process is, "Lord I love You. Therefore I am finished. I seek no other future. I do not care that others would esteem or admire me." While the Lord was on the earth, no one admired His beauty (Isa. 53:2). When you possess such a spirit of martyrdom, ministry can grow. You can have a ministry like Peter or Paul or John...if you die! You must have the spirit to sacrifice everything in the name of Christ. If you have such a spirit, your life will be so real and meaningful, for the Lord will provide you the riches to develop a ministry for your service to the Lord.

DYING SO MINISTRY MIGHT DEVELOP

Many Christians today can "lead" or pastor, etc., yet when the congregation has a real spiritual need, few can meet it, because few have devel-

oped a genuine ministry. The first reason for this is that no one wants to die! People want a good Sunday School for their kids, and so on. Some people even say, “If I take a stand for Christ, I will lose everything!” I want to ask such ones, “Are you a monkey, or a lover of Jesus?” The stand of every Jesus-lover is the willingness to live and die for Christ. This is key. Thus there is no such thing as “my choice” or “my selection”. There is only pursuing Christ, living according to truth, and laying hold of the portion of ministry the Lord grants unto you. What you get is the privilege to operate and live as the Lord leads and chooses for you. That is all.

Too many Christians are simply “accommodators”. In the book of Revelation, the first warning is about the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6). “Nico” means “over[lords]” and “laity” means “the common[folk]”. Eventually, however, it is the “laity” who conquer the “Nico”! When that happens, everything is over. When some take over like that, it is over for both. When the congregation leads, then Christ is no longer the center and Head. When we just live according to what people seem to need, everything is over. We need to take care of others according to their needs, not their demands. When we care for others according to their demands, we are damaging them rather than helping them. We must take care of people’s needs according to how the *Lord* cares about their needs rather than their demands.

The base for all serving is martyrdom. I don’t even use the word consecration, for that can mean different things to different people. To some, it means offering some money every week. The Lord doesn’t need that. He says, “Give Me everything, or give Me nothing!” Does a husband accept only a partial wife? Does he only ask her for her cooking? Does he not expect her in her entirety? Or does the husband hold back from the wife? Only in the Christian life does such nonsense seem to take place. Some think, “I’ll give You Sunday and possibly some mornings, but the rest is mine alone.” The Lord, however, expects that all the days are His, just as He is with us every day. No other marriage has such conditions besides that between Christ and His believers. Due to such negotiations, the Lord ends up being able to do very little. Outwardly we may appear to offer everything to the Lord, but inwardly there are a lot of negotiations. Therefore, there is no *reality* of marriage.

THE LORD’S OWN WAY WAS TOTAL

With the Lord, it is a matter of all or nothing. If He would not have gone all the way, He would not have come at all. When He came, He was born on a roadside and laid in a manger. Either zero, or everything! He was raised up in a carpenter’s home and worked as a carpenter, taking orders from others and building what was requested. He didn’t miraculously produce what was asked for. If He lived like that, could He be our Savior? He didn’t have to take that way, but His realization was “All or Nothing.” Therefore

He had to take on *every part* of being a man. He may have been tempted to get around some things by performing some minor miracles, but He never took a shortcut. Every part of His life was given for *our* sake. Instead of taking power when He might have, He continued on in self-denial all the way to the cross. He could have miraculously provided bread for everyone. Caesar would have hastened to come and thank Him. If that were the case, however, He could not be our Savior. With Him it was either all or nothing. He did not come to provide miraculous things, nor to take power, nor to be lifted up, but to be our Savior. He lived such a life for us.

This should be the base of all our growth. Jesus took the way of martyrdom, and He expects that we also would take this way.

TAKING THE LORD'S WAY MEANS DYING TO OUR WAY

We may go to a certain university and feel quite proud of OUR university, but all are about the same. Don't care about that; care about what the Lord wants. That should decide what you do. Are you able to say, "Lord, I do it for *Your* sake. I do it for the *church's* sake. I go not because I like it, but because I am always ready to *die* for You."

PETER: BINDING AND LOOSING BASED ON WHAT CHRIST HAS BOUND OR LOOSED

The Lord told Peter after his experience of *apokalupsis* concerning Christ and the church that whatever he bound or loosed would have been already bound or loosed in the heavens (Matt 16:19). You don't tell the Lord to bind something if the Lord has not indicated that it is already something He Himself has bound. We do not do things based on what *we* like, but based on what *Christ* desires. Christ desired that the Gentiles would be saved, so Peter's exercise was to open the way for them. Whatever the church looses or binds is also already loosed or bound in the heavens. There is such a ministry that is pioneering all the time, opening the doors and binding what needs to be bound.

PAUL: ENLARGING, SPREADING, AND ENRICHING WHAT WAS ALREADY ESTABLISHED

Then Paul came in and furnished riches to the house begun by Peter's ministry, and built additions! He labored much to enlarge and enrich this structure. (When you first get married, you build a basic house, but you may add more as your family grows. Paul opened more doors and raised up more for the Lord, insuring that the building would become richly "furnished.") In one sense, it seems as if what was supplied was richer in value than the initial "house"! In the churches, may we see many people constituted with ministries for the enriching of the church life!

Paul saw Christ and the church as one. He realized his persecution of Christians was the persecution of Christ's own Body. Thus he also realized that the more people he helped believe, the more Christ would be enlarged. Furthermore, he saw the practicality of the local church life when he saw Ananias coming to him in that vision, so he saw the need to raise up local churches from city to city as the additions to the building Peter initially worked to raise up.

THE GOVERNING VISION OF ALL MINISTRIES:
CHRIST AND THE LOCAL CHURCHES

Everyone who loves and follows the Lord has the ability to, and must, receive this vision, or else their life will be wild (Prov. 29:18). This vision is of Christ and the local churches. We must be for Christ and we must be those in the local churches.

With Paul, this vision is for all those who desire to love, pursue, live, and serve Christ in the local churches. We must see what Paul saw, or else our Christian life will not be healthy.

OUR ENTIRE LIVES ARE NEEDED TO EXPLORE WHAT WE HAVE SEEN

The husband has no right to go around his counterpart. The wife has an inbuilt ability to try to help her husband and serve him, but that doesn't mean the husband can exploit this willingness with no regard for her. Such people destroy their marriages. Husbands should be nice to their wives, no matter how much their wives are willing to serve them! The husband's care for his wife is what provides the basis for a healthy marriage, even though the ability to appreciate one's wife requires life-long learning. The husband should be able to say to his wife, "I live for you; I die for you." Then he will have the rest of their lives to explore the riches of his relationship with her. In the Christian life it is the same. Peter could say, "You are the Christ..." but his entire life was required for him to explore that revelation of Christ and the church.

WHAT WE HAVE DISCOVERED WILL DEVELOP FOR OURSELVES AND OTHERS
AS WE DEVELOP IN MINISTRY

Paul could boast that he became constituted with visions and revelations. When Paul preached the gospel, he preached the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel. When we preach the gospel, we may not be able to say much more than "Christ has died for our sins". When Paul had the burden to tell you what Christ was doing, he could say we were sinners who needed Christ's redemptive work. But more than that, after proclaiming justification in Christ's death, he went on to sanctification, mind-renew-

ing, and transformation, resulting in an ability to sacrifice and stand with the Lord as one who served Him by offering the Gentiles as acceptable sacrifices. He could love the saints even in the midst of their naughtiness. Eventually Paul could say he was crucified with Christ! Such a person was able to unveil to others how rich Christ was, and how valuable the church was. He could reveal to others who Christ was, and what the church was. He completed the Word of God; if not for him, we would not have the finished Bible in our hands today. He could furnish the churches with the unsearchable riches of Christ, by fulfilling the Word of God, and by equipping the saints for the work of ministry. Peter never achieved this. Peter was prevailing and became defeated, while Paul was defeated and became prevailing. How rich is the Christ we are able to preach? Paul fulfilled and completed the word of God, and labored to perfect the saints.

WHATEVER MINISTRY WE HAVE NEEDS PERFECTING

This is what you need the most—perfection. Every talent requires perfection. In America, everything comes too easy, although America has the best education system. This is because America’s education takes the principle of perfecting, rather than just passing exams. Every talent needs to be perfected. This is true for natural talents as well as spiritual. The element of divine life within us needs to be perfected in us. For this Paul labored, and many need to labor.

- Titus Chu (Ashland Woods, July 7, 2009 AM)

“COMMENTS” FELLOWSHIP ON MUSIC

Our Christian life must be governed by the Spirit rather than ways or methods, even though we need “ways” to carry out certain things. If our Christian life becomes governed by some way rather than the Spirit, that is a tragedy. For instance, we should be careful regarding anything that can lead or drive our singing beside the Spirit. Anything of Christ that is deep or profound can be spoiled by how it is carried out. Music can help us touch the Lord, but music should not take over. It is because of this that I am a “dissuader” when it comes to the use of drums in the meetings. We should not be against the possibility of using certain things, but neither should we allow anything to replace the Spirit. What should determine everything in the church life is whether our enjoyment is of the Spirit, or of something else. ...The problem is that so few Christians really know the Spirit.

Vision Week

MESSAGE FOUR

THE ADVANCEMENT OF MINISTRIES (2)

JAMES, PETER, AND PAUL:
THE MINISTRIES OF MARTYRDOM, RAISING UP, AND ENRICHMENT

The martyrdom of James, the brother of John, lays the groundwork of all the ministries that follow. Without a spirit of martyrdom, nothing you have can become real. With a spirit of martyrdom, what you have can be developed. Peter's ministry opened the door and raised up the churches among both the Jews and the Gentiles, and thus the basic shape of the "house" was established. His ministry was prevalent for about a decade. After Peter went to Babylon in the East, Paul labored in the West. Because Luke wrote Acts, we see mainly Paul during Acts' time frame (because Luke was one of Paul's traveling companions). To many, this indicates that the Lord Himself wanted to keep the focus upon Paul. Paul brought in so many riches into the "framework" raised up by Peter. Eventually, however, the Lord required one more type of ministry, and that was John's.

JOHN: THE APOSTLE KEPT BY THE LORD

During His earthly ministry, the Lord rendered Peter, James and John a lot of personal attention. James was quickly martyred, and Peter was purged. John was the only one of these three who continued on. If not for the books he wrote late in his life, we would think he had disappeared! He is mentioned in an early Epistle once by Paul (as a perceived "pillar" in Galatians 2:9) and not at all by Peter in his writings. Late in the century, however, after Peter and Paul had passed on, John began to write. In his writings we can see he is so one with the Lord. What brought this about, and where was he all those years? How could he become someone who was able to receive such revelation from the Lord regarding Himself and His economy? The first century of the church life was certainly full of "romance," and John's life spanned that century.

JOHN GREW UP HAVING JESUS AS A CLOSE RELATIVE

John was blessed with a certain intimacy with Christ, being his cousin (Jn 19:25; Matt 27:56; 4:21; Mk 15:40). We might visualize Jesus working on some carpentry project, asking his little cousin to fetch him something. One day, however, this little relative heard John the Baptist declare, "Behold the Lamb of God!" John's eyes were opened to see that his cousin was the Messiah! John then became Jesus' disciple, very likely His first disciple. He went from knowing Jesus in a human relationship to knowing Him as His Master in a spiritual relationship.

JOHN BECAME AN EARLY DISCIPLE OF CHRIST

After hearing John the Baptist's declaration, Andrew and John came to Jesus and asked Him, "Where do you abide?" (John 1:38). Then they began to follow Him. Peter then was also brought in, although he initially fell back and had to be recovered. (Peter may have had more in the way of obligations and possessions, so he was not able to detach himself as easily.) What followed was a marvelous period of three and a half years during which these three disciples learned and witnessed so many wonderful things!

What they especially would have been witness to would have been the Lord's virtue as a man. (If you want to be seen as a follower of Christ, the first thing you must take care of is your human virtue!) What people saw first about Jesus were His human virtues manifesting His divine attributes. John and the others also witnessed His heavenly wisdom in all His words and deeds. (For instance, Jesus interviewed the woman at the well in the open daylight, while He received Nicodemus, a man, at night.) John also witnessed the oneness Jesus had with His Father. John's Gospel portrays this in particular. Of course, John also observed so many instances of the Lord's miraculous works of power.

John was also "the disciple Jesus loved," thus he had the right to lean on Jesus' bosom (John 13:23). When the Lord told the twelve that one among them was going to betray Him, only John could say with such simplicity, "Lord...what do You mean by that?" Can we be so close to the Lord in our speaking to Him in prayer? Are we able to tell Him we love Him in such a tone as John might have used? The Lord desires a certain satisfaction, so He shows us a relationship such as this to draw us. The other disciples may have been a little impure, thinking of escaping the difficulties to come, but certainly no one was guilty of considering selling Him except Judas. John alone, however, was so simple as to ask, "Who, Lord?" (John 13:25). Satan entered into Judas' heart during that time and he went out to betray the Lord, meaning he must have been considering along those lines already.

AS CHRIST WAS BEING CRUCIFIED,
HE CHARGED THE CARE OF HIS MOTHER TO JOHN

Jesus crucifixion was the most amazing matter. On the one hand, He was physically dying; on the other hand, He was bringing forth all His believers as a new creation (John 12:24)! He did this as a man hanging on a cross. The first three hours of His crucifixion, man mocked Him (Matt. 27:39-44). The last three hours, God judged Him on our behalf (Matt. 27:45). During that time all our sins were considered as His. The most unfathomable experience took place as the Father forsook Him during those last three hours (Matt. 27:46). We have no way to touch the depth of what the Lord experienced at that point. The Lord had been with the Father continuously from the time of His birth. When a fish is pulled from the water it has lived in all its life, into the foreign environment of air, it may even change color as it experiences that shock. Perhaps that kind of analogy could help us understand. At that moment, for our sake, the Father had to turn away from Jesus. Jesus had never known one moment away from God's presence. For eternity, He had experienced face to face fellowship with His Father (John 1:1, Greek). This is why at that moment of destitution He cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Unbelievably, during this time of being under God's judgment, the Lord was able to take care of His mother! When viewed in light of what was going on within Him, this is very touching. Apparently not trusting the members of His own family such as James or Jude, Jesus said, "John, from now on you are to take care of My mother. This is My commitment to you." What a thing for John! How he must have felt, being asked to do such a thing? Would he have considered how that might hinder his becoming a foremost apostle? Yet John accepted the Lord's charge and took Mary into his home. Where was James, the brother of Jesus? His brothers must have run. Mary wouldn't have had anyone to go home to. Therefore John took care of her. Such a commitment was divine and yet so practical, demonstrating that even on the cross, Jesus was exercised in His humanity and possessed divine judgment!

JOHN WAS A PARTICIPANT FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH LIFE WITH PETER
AND WITNESSED HIS DEMISE AND JAMES' AND PAUL'S RISE

Fifty days afterwards, as John and others were praying during Pentecost, on the tenth day after the Lord's ascension, the Spirit came (Acts 1:3, leaves ten days from Passover to Pentecost, Acts 2:1). A glorious time of the gospel followed and John played a prominent part, even though Peter was clearly at the fore (Acts 1:15; 2:14; 5:15, etc.). During those few years, the church was really prevailing. Something was creeping in, however. Things

connected to Christ rose up to persecute Christ Himself! (Among us it will be the same. The things of the world will not be the chief source of difficulty. It will be that which seems closely related to Christ.) James perhaps shared some of Jesus' physical traits and also His mannerisms, having been around Him so long. He was not a disciple and Jesus did not trust him to take care of Mary, but he could use his relationship with Jesus to his political benefit in the early church. He could also tell others that Jesus fully observed the ordinances of the Law God gave to Moses, and that therefore all the believers should adhere to it as He did. Thus under James' leadership, the Jewish believers in Jerusalem became just another sect within Judaism. In this way the church changed in Jerusalem, and Peter was really put on the spot as the original leader. Due to the efforts to push him aside, he became a different Peter. For instance, in the early days, after he was miraculously released from being in jail for preaching the gospel, he boldly returned to preach in the temple again. The second time, however, he took the angel's appearance to be merely a vision at first and simply left the city after leaving a message for James (Acts 12:16-17). How tragic! Such a useful, hand-picked servant of the Lord was unable to hold up under the purging. He does take on an important role in the conference in Acts 15, but the next thing we hear about him is that he is in Babylon (1 Peter 5:13). We must praise the Lord that we have his two Epistles, for in them we see Peter did indeed become a mature brother, full of the humanity of Jesus, and living out the divine attributes he had acquired. When we read of Peter and read his writing, we see that he was someone we could really be with; he doesn't come across as someone uniquely gifted like Paul, who may seem very high to us. Even after the Lord charged Peter three times to care for His flock in John 21, he ran off from many in Jerusalem who must have been saved and raised up by him. How damaging the things related to Christ can be, being so close to Christ and yet not Christ Himself!

PETER AND PAUL: TWO DIFFERENT MINISTRIES

Peter told us we are all living stones built up into a spiritual house, and that as newborn babes we should desire the pure milk of the Word. He exhorted us to go on to develop love above all the other virtues we develop. This is all very easy to appreciate. Paul, however, wrote on many matters that were hard to comprehend. For instance, how can one understand the phrase, "Christ, the One who is over all, through all, and in all?" What does that *mean*?

As a Pharisee, Paul must have seen how those simple fishermen from Galilee with their despicable accents were bringing thousands into their circle. Paul himself was like a duke among the Pharisees. He was trained by one of the best minds among the Jews at that time. He considered himself a "Pharisee of Pharisees". Yet everyone's focus in Jerusalem was centered

upon these ignorant bumpkins! Paul must have really hated that. He participated in the killing of Stephen (he was just too richly dressed to throw a stone himself, so he kept the clothes...or perhaps Luke was just too polite to show Paul throwing a stone himself). After that, Paul rose up to really persecute the believers. Then, around 37 AD, the Lord appeared to him as he was on his way to round up more Christians for death. Following that, in just thirty years (ten years preparing, ten years pursuing, and ten years imprisonment — allowing a couple years during which he went to Spain) he accomplished an incredible amount. How many churches and how many saints he raised up in only ten years! Afterwards he was captured in Jerusalem after being presumably set up by James. No one seemed to care about him, even among the believers there. Christians are a kind of animal that only Jesus can love! Peter and Paul ended up both being martyred about the same time.

JOHN: PRESERVATION AND PERFECTING IN CARING FOR MARY

John's obligation to take care of Mary may have prevented him from fully participating in the events in Jerusalem (with James' approval, no doubt). Many scholars believe that around 58 AD, John took Mary out of Jerusalem and that about ten years later, she died. John may have been close to 60 years of age. He may have felt, "When I was 20, I felt I was the most hopeful apostle. Jesus treated me like I was His little brother. I became the first to follow Him!" After faithfully having taken care of Jesus' mother all that time, however, he must have felt he was washed up.

If, however, he didn't have this responsibility I believe he might have gotten into trouble with James, and who knows what would have happened to him, being such a "Son of Thunder"? Jesus needed John to be preserved for a certain stage of the church life that was yet to come. I believe Jesus had this in view when he gave John this assignment. We can imagine many cases, just as John wanted to do something to rise up, Mary might have raised her voice to say, "John, can you do this for me?" This went on year after year. What a torture! And what a protection! This kept John for the last stage. Leader James died just before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Thus James, John's brother, died; Paul died, Peter died, and James the brother of Jesus died. Many other leaders had died as well. John lived through the era of Jerusalem's destruction. The churches at that time all became "orphans," for all the spiritual men they had looked up to were gone. John alone remained. Then Mary died.

JOHN'S DESIRE: TO SATISFY CHRIST ALONE

Over time, Jesus' commission to John to take care of His mother must have produced much feeling within him. As time passed, the opportunity to

operate and become manifested seemed to disappear. He must have felt useless. He was old. How many teeth did he even have left? He had seen and participated in such great things, and was the youngest and possibly most hopeful among all the apostles. Instead of some great task, however, the Lord charged him to care for an old woman! Still, I believe he often prayed, “I have never been useful to You, Lord, but I love You. I feel like my life has been wasted, but I don’t care, as long as You are satisfied.” I believe he genuinely loved Mary and realized that someone had to care for her, unlike James. (Religion does not produce love; only Jesus produces love!) John may have seemed to have been marginalized and useless, yet he could still tell the Lord that he only loved HIM. He continued to serve Mary faithfully, even though there was no reward other than a heavenly one. To see your life consumed with no seeming result is a difficult experience. Can we tell the Lord we are willing to live such a life? Can we tell Him, “I would like to be of no use to anyone but You. As long as You are satisfied, that is good enough. I love You. That is enough.” ?

- Titus Chu (*Ashland Woods, July 7, 2009 PM*)

“COMMENTS”

ON IDOL WORSHIP AND FORNICATION

The Lord seeks those who refuse to bow down to anything that challenges God’s place in their lives. Money and what it brings, however, is a most common idol. The Lord tells us we cannot love God and mammon (mammon being the one thing the Lord places in direct opposition to God—Matthew 6:24). Many young people don’t know what mammon is yet, so they can declare “We don’t love the world.” Once someone begins to draw a salary and enjoy a comfortable office, he or she may begin to feel the world and what it provides is worthwhile! We must beware of what can become idolatry in our lives. ...

We live in an age that basically preaches fornication. Young people must keep themselves from immorality and fornication. By this I do not mean only spiritually, but even the more physically. The sisters in particular need to be on guard, for young men will say anything to cheat them. Those who you trust will despise you later. For your lifelong joyfulness, keep yourself from immorality.

Vision Week

MESSAGE FIVE

THE APOSTLE JOHN'S DEVELOPMENT AND MINISTRY

JOHN AND MARY AND JAMES

Mary and John possibly left Jerusalem for the countryside 20 years after the church life had begun in Jerusalem. Perhaps even she could not take her son James' influence anymore. He was one who really destroyed the work of the Lord, replacing the work of the Spirit with the works of the Law and replacing the Lord's influence with his own. He may not have fully intended to do so but it happened anyway. He was not focused on Christ.

Perhaps James and Jude were too tough on their mother Mary as they neglected her, even if it was in the name of doing God's work. Therefore she may have been behind the move to Galilee (if this is where John and Mary moved). Mary possibly couldn't handle it any longer in Jerusalem because of the neglect her sons exhibited towards her as they carried out their religious duties.

James' influence was not confined to Jerusalem. Men "from James" went out from Jerusalem to visit the other churches (Galatians 2:12). Even Peter feared them! In Antioch, everything was going well until those "from James" came. When Peter got up, feeling exposed as one eating among Gentiles, Paul, who was also there, rebuked him publicly. (Being a spiritual man, Peter received Paul's rebuke.) James' message of keeping Judaistic practices—including circumcision, offerings and dietary regulations—was in direct opposition to the gospel of grace Paul preached.

JOHN AND PAUL AND PETER

John lived through nearly the entire first century AD. We can say the first century was the century of John, even though for about sixty of those years he was confined by various situations. Paul was someone who always strongly operated, whether as a Pharisee or as an apostle of Christ. He really knew the Scriptures, so he was able to apply all he knew towards the New Testament

revelation. Paul, however, was martyred around 67 AD. Peter faded for a time after he was first called by the Lord, for he was somewhat purged from Jerusalem when James took the reins. The Lord was able to still use Peter as he matured further. James, the oldest brother of Jesus (biblical author Jude was another), died around the time Jerusalem fell in 70 AD. He messed up the situation, particularly after the church in Jerusalem had become very large and prevailing. He destroyed the Lord's work, even as he felt he was serving God. So as Paul was prevailing, Peter was declining (but even so, he became very mature through what he passed through, as seen in his two epistles), and James was busy spreading his destructive teachings.

AFTER KNOWING CHRIST AS A CLOSE RELATIVE AND AS A DISCIPLE,
JOHN WAS CONFINED TO CARING FOR MARY

Perhaps the most difficult time in John's life was when he had to care for Mary as she grew older. Can you imagine John at 60 taking care of Mary at 80? He must have prayed a lot and experienced so much of Christ as he was under the perfecting of that confinement. That confinement also saved him in another way, for as he was preoccupied with Mary's needs, he was prevented from becoming too involved in the work and threatening James. Gradually, over time, one servant after another died, and all the churches became "orphan" churches. John saw all this as it was happening. Here was a spiritual man confined by an old lady, yet all the churches were in great need. What kind of psychology that must have produced? Then, Mary died. I doubt John felt relieved; he was a spiritual man. He no doubt grieved over her. But it takes around five years for something to work itself out, and by then it is difficult to recover. John must have realized the opportunity for doing something was passing every day. The window of opportunity might have even appeared to have been just about closed by the time Mary died. But this was all part of the Lord's preparation of John for his ministry.

ENTERING THE STAGE OF MINISTRY AFTER MARY'S DEATH: EPHESUS

After Mary passed on, and after Jerusalem fell following many years of siege and struggle, and after all the other servants of the Lord had passed away, the churches were in great need of nourishment. Perhaps Timothy invited John, who was seventy by this time, to Ephesus. (You cannot just go anywhere as a servant of the Lord, there are "ethics" involved as to what you can do. John wouldn't have just gone to such a place to fulfill his ministry when others were there already. He may have considered Babylon and Antioch or Corinth. Eventually, however, he ended up at Ephesus.) If it were me, I would have gone to Antioch, where Jews and Gentiles were first together in the church life. Second, I would have considered Babylon as the place Peter had labored. Third, I would have considered a big city with a large surrounding area that depended

upon it, like Athens as a center of culture or Corinth as a center of finance. Yet John ended up in Ephesus, which was indeed a major city. Still, it would not have been easy for him to go. He may have written Timothy, and Timothy may have agreed with his feeling. Or Timothy may himself have invited John. The believers must have all heard that Mary, the mother of the Lord, had died. John may have been the last apostle remaining of the apostolic era, so Timothy may have invited John to come. They must have shared the same view, or else Timothy would not have invited him to labor where he also was laboring.

John had been faithful to the Lord's commitment to care for His mother. In the process, he may have felt he was not worthy to fill the shoes of those such as Paul. Still, the Lord used John, even though he may not have felt worthy. Sometimes when you feel most worthy, the Lord lays you aside, and sometimes when you feel most unworthy, the Lord uses you in a great way. We must simply be ambitious to be well-pleasing to the Lord, as John was.

John by this time was no longer a "son of thunder" (Mk 3:17), but a "son of anointing". He was also a person of life and truth, and full of human virtues that manifested the Lord's divine attributes. It is possible that some of the other original apostles were still alive but if so, according to tradition they would have been far off in places such as India. John should have become a source of fellowship for many churches all over the world. Still, some would have refused to fellowship with him, in spite of their need. (Never say that not to fellowship is a wise decision! Fellowship should always be pursued.) He should have been admired and respected by all the saints, having been through so much and having seen so much. He was the last direct link to the Lord's earthly ministry. I believe John began to appreciate the Lord's will in preserving him for the sake of all the churches.

Some historians suggest Timothy was still present in the leadership even when John was in Ephesus, although I believe that would have been awkward. John's life-supply would have produced leading. I believe Timothy likely died soon after inviting John. The other co-workers of Paul would have respected him.

THREATENED WITH MARTYRDOM AND EXILED TO PATMOS

The Roman Emperor Domitian sought to persecute the Christians, and John would have been foremost, so Domitian laid hold of John. According to tradition he was even boiled in oil, but whether or not that is true, in the New Testament era we should not become fixated on such things. Our focus should be upon what dispenses life rather than miracles. I believe that as John was threatened he stood very firm, and said, "Go ahead and kill me, but I will not deny my Lord." He didn't lose heart. Domitian, perhaps to seem merciful to an old man, sent John to the island of Patmos instead, where John received the Revelation!

After some years in exile, John returned to Ephesus. Wouldn't that have seemed to him like a dream? By this time, he was an aged person. Wouldn't he have felt as though the island of Patmos was the end? Perhaps everyone felt it was over for John. At first he may have received letters from saints in the churches, but those letters probably came less and less until correspondence dried up completely. (Remember: Christians are peculiar animals that only Jesus can love. I hope the virtue of "let us live and die together" is growing among us. We can only trust in the Lord's transformation work in each other, however.)

JOHN THE WRITER: PERFECTED, FLOWING LIFE, LIVING IN DIVINE INCORPORATION

After John wrote Revelation on Patmos and returned to Ephesus, he wrote his Gospel and three Epistles. In them we see a person who was really incorporated with the Lord. He truly became a man flowing life instead of dispensing doctrine. His writings are simple and profound. He wrote of the anointing from God that we believers all possess, and who we may trust to lead. The anointing teaches all things; we have no need that any man teach us how to follow Christ!

John became a spiritual man with a heavenly view, writing of God as Spirit (John 4:24), as love (1 John 4:8), and as light (1 John 1:5). He wrote of how the Lord accomplishes His economy, and he wrote of experiencing Christ as the Word of life (1 John 1:1). He sought to bring others into the fellowship he enjoyed with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3). John was really someone who could say, "Have fellowship with us! We have fellowship with the Father and with His Son!" Most people wish they could impress others with their experience and ability, but John had no such motive. The more we break free of all such mixture, the greater the impact of what the Spirit wants to speak can come forth. John didn't come to conquer or subdue others...he wanted only that others be brought into the same enjoyment of the Triune God that he enjoyed.

A MAN WHO COULD BE DIRECT WITHOUT "THUNDERING"

Perhaps because he was a "son of thunder," the Lord told him to take care of His mother. Every cup of milk she asked for washed away some of his "thundership." By the time he wrote his writings he could still be straightforward, but he could do so without "thundering"!

JOHN'S REVELATION OF THE LOCAL CHURCHES AND
THEIR CONNECTION WITH THE NEW JERUSALEM

The revelation John received and wrote down as the conclusion to the Bible begins with Christ and the local churches in time and ends with the

New Jerusalem in eternity; everything else that takes place in Revelation lies between these two points. I was speaking with a brother who wondered why, when teaching on the church, Watchman Nee stressed the practical matter of the local ground in addition to the purely spiritual aspects. The answer lies here. The Lord began in His ministry by being introduced as the Lamb of God, and He begins Revelation by His addressing the seven churches. If there were no local churches, from where would the initial seal of the seven seals, the white horse (Rev. 6:2), come from? That white horse is the beginning of something that culminates in the New Jerusalem.

The churches the Lord speaks to and everything that follows are directly connected. The Revelation of John begins with the seven local churches, and out from that portrait the rest follows. For instance, the man-child in chapter 12 comes from the local churches. If we would see Jesus in all the aspects in which He is revealed in chapter 1, we must be among those who are bearing the Lord's testimony as His churches, for He walks as such a One among the churches. People fabricate things in their own minds about who Jesus is, but the center of the divine revelation is Christ as He is depicted in chapter 1, and the manifestation is the testimony of Jesus, which are the local churches seen in chapters 1 through 3. (Every local church is for the Lord's testimony and the carrying out of the Lord's economy upon the earth with all the other local churches.)

Out from Christ come the local churches, through which churches the gospel is preached and from which the overcomers are produced. Eventually, the New Jerusalem comes forth.

HOW DOES ONE DEFINE THE LOCAL CHURCH?

First, the Triune God is the source of the church. If you cannot sense that God is among those who seemingly are practicing the church life, there may be a problem.

Furthermore, the local church is defined by inclusiveness on the local ground. Some seem to think if they can "take the ground" before others do that they can claim some kind of sovereignty over whoever else may want to practice the church life in their town. If someone thinks they need to beat others to the punch in taking the ground so others must join THEM, they do not see the church. What marks the church is inclusiveness. Once those who claim to be the church become exclusive, they lose the mark of being the church. (Even so, you have to be able to fellowship even with those in this condition. Otherwise you yourself become exclusive.)

If there is more than one group claiming to be the church, how do they decide among themselves who should drop what or pick up what? Prayer and fellowship! In one situation I had to ask that two groups meeting as the church come together due to my own inability to be present for each group separately. They did, and during that time they enjoyed something heavenly,

because they all partook of the cup and the bread together in oneness!

The local church is not an easy matter, for when you say “local church,” you must give up your preference. In exchange, you experience Jesus Christ, who is the reality of the Body. As long as all the brothers are one as members of Christ’s one Body, whatever they decide to practice doesn’t matter that much. When all the leading ones are one through prayer and fellowship, the church is one. Therefore, the leading ones must gather together and pray much!

The important thing you must ask yourself as those desiring to be the church is this: “Are we one with all of the Lord’s believers?” Your Lord’s table must include all who are the Lord’s. If something is important and profound, yes, Christians will always be re-examining the matter. There may even be disagreement, as there has been over the matter of justification by faith. In application, things may differ. What everyone must agree with, however, is that the way itself is through Christ and the local churches.

- Titus Chu (Ashland Woods, July 8, 2009 AM)

“COMMENTS”

SERVING THE LORD IN PURITY

We have to be so pure. We don’t love the Lord so our kids might turn out better. You should not say we never would go to a city because of its school system. You have to learn to be before the Lord and say, “Lord I trust my children to You; You raise them up.” I can testify that the Lord has provided the best care for my children, even though the situations I was brought into often did not seem conducive at the time. Don’t proclaim, “I love Jesus!” and then trust something else.

We may say, “Praise the Lord for the Spirit” or “Praise the Lord for the Body,” but do we know how the light concerning these matters has come to us? The light concerning these great things has not come cheaply. Some have paid a great price so that we might enjoy such realities today. The assurance of justification by faith is ours today because Martin Luther paid a high price, even enduring persecution. There is not one spiritual thing we have today that has come cheaply. Someone risked their life and everything for Christ. This is what has produced what we have today. Such people are the Lord’s servants. The Lord is jealous, so He does not allow anyone beside His Son to be perfect. God allows all of us to have lots of problems. Yet at the same time we must appreciate how these saints, in spite of their imperfections and even because of them, have struggled that we might possess the riches God has for us to enjoy.

Vision Week

MESSAGE SIX

JOHN'S CONCLUDING REVELATION CONCERNING JESUS CHRIST AND THE LOCAL CHURCHES (1)

John likely passed away around age 90, close to the end of the first century. Peter died much earlier. He had labored to introduce the Christian faith and establish the initial structure of the church. Read his epistles and you will find tenderness. You will sense his sweetness. He is similar to John in this regard. It is a wonder how such uneducated, rough-hewn men could have written such marvelous things!

OUR HERITAGE CONCERNING CHRIST AND THE LOCAL CHURCHES

I met a Christian group who let me know they would receive me if I would just denounce a certain servant of the Lord. To my feeling, however, whether that brother was one thing or another was not for me to judge; he was the Lord's servant. No one is perfect, and we worship no man. But to my feeling I owed that servant so much; indeed, the reason I love the Lord today as I do has much to do with him. Thus even while I was willing to fellowship with that group, I could not meet their demand. I am not a politician, but a servant of the Lord! As I was driven away, I was told they were in fellowship with 3 million believers! (There are perhaps 150 million Christians in China, and in China a Christian is really a Christian! At least seventy percent of the believers in China claim the ministry of Watchman Nee as part of their heritage. Many in China love the Lord and have seen something of the church due to his ministry.)

The Lord has measured so much to us. In four years, the places that have begun to open up to fellowship with us have greatly multiplied. We are with a family tradition, and with the divine commitment. We are not just a bunch of Christians meeting as free groups. We are burdened with a commitment that is from the Lord, and we treasure it just as people of various nationalities treasure

their countries. You should be proud of the United States. The Lord has really blessed this country. When you say “I am a Christian” you should be joyful, and if you can say “I am a Christian with divine commitment” you should be very joyful. What is our commitment? It is Christ and the local churches!

It is not the numbers that we boast in, but in the Lord’s work and what He has done. Can you believe the Lord was able to do so much through Peter and Paul and John? Think of Peter. He grew up as a fisherman. Looking back on his life, how must he have felt? (Even though the Roman Catholics made him pope, we should still love the believers among them.) Local churches are expressions of oneness in their localities representing Christ. Our life is different from everyone else’s life. Others may have Christ also, but not such a marvelous Christ as we have seen, and with such a marvelous purpose! People boast in everything. We are good at nothing, but we are good at what God is good at! We have nothing, but we have the best! We have the Lord Jesus, we have the church, we have the church life! Because of this, we are more than blessed.

So many people have been blessed through the ministry of Watchman Nee. He died tragically, in a work camp, poisoned by a brother who promised to take care of him. But if you read his last letter, he says “I keep the joyfulness in my heart.” I believe he saw that what the Lord had given him would grow as a seed. I also believe he saw that his difficult situation would pave the way for the spread of the gospel. It was only preparation for something marvelous to come. And such a great crop in China *did* come to the Lord due to that labor.

THE LOCAL CHURCHES:

THE TRIUNE GOD IS THEIR SOURCE

What is a local church? First, a local church must know its source. If anything departs from its proper source, we know the situation is not healthy. What is the source of the local church? The Triune God is the source of the local churches. So when the Triune God seems remote, you know something is wrong. If, on the other hand, the Triune God is richly present, you know everything is wonderful, even if the outward situation is difficult.

CARED FOR BY THE ONE WHO WAS, WHO IS, AND WHO IS TO COME

The source of the Revelation introduces Himself as “Him who is, who was, and who is to come” (Rev. 1:4). Who can say that? You will live a certain number of years. God says, “I AM, I WAS, and I WILL BE”. There is one entity that dares to call Himself such. Only HE deserves our life. If you want bread, He IS. If you want education, He IS. If you want happiness, He IS. If you want to touch the heavens, He IS. (He isn’t Satan, however! If you want Satan, He isn’t.) You may complain that the Lord did this or that in your life, but He will reply, “I WAS”. If you want to change something against His desire, He may

answer, "I AM". Don't think your life is wrong. He knew when you should have gone to school. He knows exactly what your life has been, for He WAS. But the best is that He is yet to come. He will be! He will be all your life.

Old men have memories. I passed through a lot in China as we moved from city to city during the war. Then I got saved and began to experience the church life. The Lord showed me many things one after another. Compared with the eternity of Christ, however, no one can say they are so "experienced". There is still so much to come! There is no life higher or more romantic than a life with Christ. We can worship the Lord for the past, love the Lord for what is present, and praise Him for what is coming. The Lord has arranged everything for our profit.

The church also has the seven Spirits, or the complete Spirit, or the seven-fold Spirit. No matter how great our need is, the Spirit is able to elevate, strengthen, uplift and meet all our need.

Sisters may wonder whether the Lord can understand them. The Lord can meet ALL needs, however, even the finer needs of the female. He meets all the needs by elevating and making strong. The Triune God as the Spirit can meet all the needs of mankind. He can strengthen anyone to live unto Him as the I WAS-I AM-I WILL BE.

CARED FOR BY THE FAITHFUL WITNESS, FIRSTBORN FROM AMONG THE DEAD,
AND RULER OF THE KINGS OF THE EARTH

Christ is the faithful Witness, and has resurrected and is now the Ruler of the kings of the earth (Rev. 1:5). This One has become the source of the church. Once you see this, you will never be bothered with how the church looks outwardly. With the Triune God as the source, the Seven-fold Spirit to strengthen, and Christ as Lord of the kings of the earth to rule over everything, the church becomes strong and unshakable, and well able to bear His testimony.

WASHED IN THE BLOOD TO BE PRIESTS TO GOD

The members of the church are washed by the blood of Christ to be priests to God (Rev. 1:5-6).

MANIFESTING THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS IN LOCALITIES

They manifest the testimony of Jesus in localities (v. 11). When the Lord says, "to Cleveland," He means to the church in that city, not some particular group. The local church to some seems to make no sense, but without the local church nothing makes any sense. If you cannot see the local church, what do you want to be? A Baptist? A Presbyterian? A free group? I like to see in every city there is a group of brothers who stand upon the ground of oneness in that

locality to bear the testimony. The Lord's word here clearly shows there is but one church. To Ephesus... To Smyrna... To Pergamos... and so on. Whether a large city or a small city, it makes no difference. As long as there are Christians, they should meet as the church in that city. Seven churches, seven cities. We make things complicated; the Lord makes it simple: the church equals the locality. It is we who make it complicated by bringing in the divisive names.

HAVING AS THEIR REALITY THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA,
THE BEGINNING AND THE END

The reality of the church is the all-sufficient, all-abundant, almighty God. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. To see the church, you really have to appreciate this. For the sake of the church in Cleveland Christ is the beginning and the end, and everything in between. He is surely able to meet every need. (Because we are all-naughty, the Lord is almighty. In every situation we like to escape, but for some reason we can never quite get away. He has a way to regulate things.) The churches can never say that Christ ever comes up short, for Christ shall always be able to dispense His all-sufficiency to the church.

The Lord says, "I am that I am," but we say, "I like what I am". This is why we do things to get away from the Lord. No one can trust your consecration, but we can trust His power to bring His people back to what He desires. If we run away too often, however, we make waste of our time. Yet as the Almighty, He will accomplish His desire with us.

ONE WITH THE LORD'S SERVANTS

The local church should learn to be one with the Lord's servants. John was one who was a companion in tribulation and endurance (Rev. 1:9). The Lord could have made us miraculously perfect as His servants, but He doesn't raise us up in that way. John says he was raised up in the way of patience. We may wish to be a different kind of servant, commanding everyone's respect. John, however, could say he was their servant, able to go through everything with them as they grew. A servant of the Lord knows how to be patient with others as they grow. The churches need such servants. A real servant doesn't demand things of those he serves. He bears with others. John could be a companion in the high things of the kingdom, or in the low things, even in sufferings.

No servant of the Lord can stay away from being in spirit. John was in spirit when he received the revelation (v. 10). He was a person who enjoyed the resurrection of Christ in his spirit. All the local churches need servants like this. Every local church answers to Christ, and all need His servants to be with them.

- Titus Chu (*Ashland Woods, July 8, 2009 PM*)

Vision Week

MESSAGE SEVEN

JOHN'S CONCLUDING REVELATION CONCERNING JESUS CHRIST AND THE LOCAL CHURCHES (2)

The Lord revealed unto John His administrative economy from the time of His death and resurrection unto eternity future. I believe the Lord foresaw the need of the churches and that this ultimate revelation needed to be given before the first generation passed away. I believe this is why He asked John to take care of His mother. This is quite amazing. Because of that charge, John was preserved. Over time, the leadership that had been present was lost. If John had not been preserved, it would have been hard for the believers in that circumstance to follow the Lord. By then, the believers needed not the example of martyrdom, but the exhibition of human virtues. John did not pioneer anything or develop the work (although he had a few students such as Ignatius and Polycarp). As far as we know, he never tried to establish more churches. What he was given, however, was for the churches.

THE LOCAL CHURCHES SHOULD MATCH WHAT SHALL BE IN ETERNITY

If you asked the Lord about the local churches in eternity, He might reply, "There is no Baptist, no Presbyterian, nor any other such name here. I burned your theology." What we enjoy in eternity will be what we produce today. If in eternity there are no Baptists, non-denominational, inter-denominational, etc., then it should be the same today. At that time there will only be one church. But today space is an issue, so we are one with those Christians in our *locality* and fight for the testimony of that oneness in our locality.

AS BELIEVERS WE MUST SIMPLY BE ONE WITH OTHER BELIEVERS

If you are not careful, you can make the "local church" a denomination by making certain things issues. A church is a church! If someone says, "Let's take the ground before someone else does!" then that indicates they don't get it. We are in the church in our locality with the other believers in our locality.

If someone does not agree with this let me ask them, "If we are not the local church, what are we? A Baptist church? A non-denominational church? An inter-denominational church? A free group? A Titus Chu or Witness Lee or Watchman Nee church?" No. I am of the church in Cleveland because I am with the brothers in Cleveland. What is there to argue about? The name? Whether Cleveland church or church in Cleveland, who cares? My King James version says "church of the Laodiceans" instead of "church in Laodicea" (3:14). Darby's uses the word "assembly" instead of "church". The name is not the real issue. The real issue is whether you see who you are. (Of course, you must take care of the name properly or else you can make yourself a sect.)

My name, Chu, is pronounced "pig" but reads as "red". The second part of my name means "filled with great plans" and "I am the center of everything". Don't write it wrong, because that's my name! It could also be written "digging" or "worms". If you said, "Your name means 'red pig digging worms'," that would offend me. On one hand, the name doesn't mean much. On the other hand, a proper name means something. If you call Mike "E-kim" he wouldn't be so happy. A name has representative value. This is why the Lord gave us the best way, which is just to be called the church in our locality. Manuscript evidence indicate that in Revelation 3:14, it is indeed the church IN Laodicea, rather than OF the Laodiceans, even though it could be argued they basically mean the same thing. (Darby's use of "assembly" sometimes has some problems because it is hard to visualize how an assembly can be as inclusive in its meaning as the word "church" as it is used in the New Testament.) Every local church should be a sign and foretaste of the New Jerusalem. God desires all the believers in your city to be so one. In such a daily, regular church life, you meet with Christians in oneness, as is the situation in the New Jerusalem.

LOCALLY WE MUST BE GENERAL RATHER THAN SPECIFIC IN AFFILIATION

Perhaps the Chinese would like to have a Chinese church, and the Slavs would like a Slavic church, and so on. That is how division comes about. After a time, Christians can become affiliated in ways besides simply being of Christ alone. Once you identify yourself in such a way, you denominate yourself. Christians should simply fellowship with those beside them. No one can fellowship with everyone in the world. Neither can we say we can receive all ministries. We only can receive ministries that build up the church. (Otherwise you only invite speakers, which is political since it is for profit to yourself as well to those who speak.) If someone is a Baptist preacher, he may be invited as long as he only shares the riches of Christ and promotes nothing of that emphasis that distinguish so-called Baptists from other believers.

OUR PRACTICE SHOULD ENABLE US TO BE FREE TO FOLLOW THE LORD AND
YET NOT LEND ITSELF TO EXCLUSIVENESS

Whatever we do in the church life must issue forth from our occupation with the Lord, not with the thing itself. Forming a choir to sing is fine if it is something from the Lord, but not if it is just to do something because that is what Christian groups do. For the testimony's sake, it would be good to conclude our prayers in the name of Jesus. Inviting others to our gatherings often exposes us, for we often invite people for reasons other than Christ and the church. We should never use the church as the capital for us to gain something. Jesus sees the church just as the New Jerusalem where all the believers are one. Oneness is a reality. If you don't have it as a reality, you can claim to be zero percent denominational, and still be a denomination. When we take away all the circles that serve to separate us from other believers where we live, then spontaneously we will find ourselves in oneness.

What about practices such a tongue-speaking? Can we tolerate all practices, or should we seek out those who practice what we feel is right? We should be careful about certain things (Pentecostals often become vulnerable to immorality because of their practices in spite of their purity.) What can we do? When Christians decide to group themselves together a certain way they separate themselves from all the others in their range of fellowship. What should our response be to such who claim to be of a certain "feather"? We simply shouldn't recognize it. We should be able to fellowship with all other believers where we live. To us, the local church should mean all the believers in that city. We don't hate the believers who denominate themselves, but we do hate the institutions that lend structure to division. The Lord's desire is that all such divisive circles might be taken away, simply because they cut the local brothers and sisters off from one another.

WHAT WILL BE IN THE NEW JERUSALEM
SHOULD BE WHAT WE PRACTICE IN THE CHURCH LIFE TODAY

The way to keep the oneness is to practice "one locality, one church". Within our locality we must be as general as possible and avoid doing whatever would bring about division. This is the New Jerusalem. In the New Jerusalem, you will not be able to find a Baptist congregation, a Presbyterian congregation, or even a "free group". The height and breadth and depth of the New Jerusalem will be 1400 miles on a side. How big will the new earth be to support such a structure? There is such a city. Will you even be able to find a "local church" meeting as distinct from other gatherings? The local church belongs to time. The time of the local churches is the preparatory stage for the New Jerusalem. Everything we experience today will become greater in the next age. At that time there will be no feeling or practice of division. In this age, therefore, neither should there be any feeling or practice of division.

The fact is today that nobody can be with all the Christians, for at this time we are limited in time and space. Neither can we receive all the ministries. We can only receive those that build up the local churches with the one Body in view. Too many preachers today come to a place to make that place a part of their own kingdom. How many can purely say they go to a city so that the church there might be built up?

If you remember whatever the New Jerusalem has you should have, you will be helped. It is just that simple.

JOHN'S VISION OF CHRIST IN REVELATION

John heard a great voice and saw seven golden lampstands, or churches. The sound of a trumpet indicates the time has come for action. Jesus says, in effect, that He is God's economy, and the One carrying out God's economy. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last. He told John, "Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamos and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea" (Rev 1:11). These seven cities spoke simply of seven churches.

CLOTHED WITH FINE LINEN TO THE FEET AS A PRIEST:
CARING FOR THE CHURCHES IN HIS FINE HUMANITY

When John describes Jesus, he begins by describing Jesus' clothing! That seems inappropriate somehow, but there is a reason. The first element needed in the church life is a virtuous humanity, which is represented by the garment of fine linen which goes down even to the Lord's feet (Rev 1:13). If we were afraid of Jesus, we would be in trouble (not that we should not *fear* Him). In our lives we will have many high experiences and many low experiences. The Lord's arm is around us. (This is His humanity, represented by the garment.) The Lord shepherds the church with His humanity with His divine purpose in view. If He came to us glowing in His divinity, we would be scared to death! Instead, He comes to us so sweetly. If you are depressed, He is with you. If you feel high, He is with you. We are up and down, but the Lord is able to bring us through. This is how His description by John begins.

The Lord's garment reaches to the feet, indicating He is wearing the priestly garb of the Old Testament. He comes as the high priest to bear all our weaknesses and to bring us to God and to bring God to us so that God might become so real to us and we might become so satisfying to God.

I began to bear responsibility in the church at a young age. Looking back, I realize many things could have been done differently, and perhaps more saints could have been helped and protected, but the Lord is the covering One.

GIRT ABOUT THE BREAST WITH A GOLDEN GIRDLE:
BOUND TO US WITH THE LOVE OF ETERNITY

The Lord is filled with human virtues expressing divine attributes. He carries us and leads. Furthermore, He is girt about the breast with a golden girdle (Rev 1:13). The breast is where the heart is. The Lord really loves us, and has done everything for us based upon His love. He does not love us, however, with human love that is changeable. The Lord loves us with love that belongs to eternity. A girdle is something that holds you. Once we are bound to the Lord, we are held by the strength of His unchangeable, divine love.

HIS HEAD AND HAIR LIKE WOOL, WHITE AS SNOW:
DOING EVERYTHING FOR US IN HIS WISDOM AND PURITY
WITH ETERNITY IN VIEW

His head and hair is like wool, as white as snow (Rev 1:14). White symbolizes it is everlasting (Dan. 7:9). Eternity both includes time and surpasses time. A “good” meeting is not only good for the time you are in the meeting; a “good” meeting is also good for eternity. Everything in the Lord’s mind has eternity in view. Everything we do, however, usually has something temporary in view. We may prepare for a certain thing, but usually not with eternity in view!

I believe it is very possible that those who are young today will live to see the Lord come back. You will at that time be able to see how the Lord has done everything for you with eternity in view. He has never done a thing just for that thing; everything He has done is for eternity. That is why so many things disagree with us. Suppose the Lord causes you to go bankrupt. That may be what is best for you with eternity in view. The spouse you end up with is for your eternal benefit. Your family was chosen for your eternity and Christ’s eternity. Everything that happens to you is with eternity in view.

The Lord’s hair as well as His head are white. This means what He does is full of experience as well as being everlasting. He not only plans for us, but also is able to carry us through. White also depicts His purity. We may charge that He just laid hold of us so He might have a wife for His own satisfaction. The Lord would answer, “If I were to make you anything else, what would be better? I have given you the best!” The Lord is so much for us. He has never been selfish. Everything the Lord has done is for Himself because He knows it is also the best for us. Whatever He has done is out of sincere love for us, thus it is most pure.

- *Titus Chu (Ashland Woods, July 9, 2009 AM)*

Vision Week

MESSAGE EIGHT

JOHN'S CONCLUDING REVELATION CONCERNING JESUS CHRIST AND THE LOCAL CHURCHES (3)

The local church is a matter of sight, not of argument. Argument can be endless, but it does not change the necessity of practicing a church life according to the revelation concerning the local churches. Once you truly see the oneness, you dare not do anything to offend it. Once you see the church, you realize that every born-again Christian is in the church, and every born-again Christian should be a part of its testimony.

This oneness is expressed in localities, for every locality is a miniature model of the New Jerusalem. Anything the New Jerusalem doesn't have, the local church should try to get away from. We are destined for the New Jerusalem. In the New Jerusalem there will be no man to follow other than Christ, there will be no division, and there will be no particular teaching. Therefore we should not have such things today either! Paul said that what he could share was only partial, but when the Lord returned, everything would be made clear (1 Cor. 13:12).

If the leading ones in a locality are one, the saints there will be one. The leaders thus have to be desperate to pray and fellowship so that the oneness may be maintained.

When I was visiting a particular locality, a brother there told me, "If you and [a named] ministry wouldn't argue, we would be in a much happier situation." Rather than caring about the testimony God was after, he cared for a pleasant situation, even if it meant compromise. (I have never felt anyone has divided themselves away from me nor I from them, nor is it up to me whether some should decide to depart from the way of the church. We have never changed our stand, although we cannot answer for others.)

Another group I visited claimed to be the "orthodox" local church in a town. If someone claims to be the truly "orthodox" church among others claiming to stand as the church, they also do not see the church! The Lord's table we partake of should be for all the Christians in the city; therefore you don't fight over who is the "orthodox" group within the city.

Another place asked whether they should have the Lord's table, because

they had been “excommunicated” by a certain ministry. I said, “If you can partake of the Lord’s table with the view that every Christian is part of that table, then the Lord will bless your exercise.”

If we are here for Christ, we care for what He desires, not what we desire. We must be for what the Lord has committed to us. There may be no way that all Christians can meet together, for we are limited by space and time. Furthermore, others confine themselves by things such as their own traditions. Even if we cannot shake hands with all the other Christians, we can still love all of them and follow Christ. The fact of the local church will have to be continuously unveiled to us, just as justification by faith will have to be continuously unveiled to us. After 500 years, theologians still argue about such things as whether a person can be saved and yet not be born again! Others feel you can lose your salvation. Many argue for eternal security. Do these arguments mean justification is to be discarded by believers? No. Neither is the matter of the local church wrong because it is a matter many continue to study.

THE LORD’S EYES AS A FLAME OF FIRE: JUDGING AND COMFORTING

The Lord’s eyes are like a flame of fire as He walks in the midst of the churches (Rev 1:14). That eye is a judging, examining light. When this light comes, however, whatever is improper just disappears. Many times we are really bold as we do something—until that eye appears! One time soon after I began to follow the Lord I was declaring some nonsense to some other young brothers about how the Lord should bless me with entrance into college for being such a good brother... and then an elder walked by. That exposed me, and the brothers who were caring for me really got rebuked because of that. When I found out that those brothers got rebuked for not caring for me properly, all I got out of it was that I must be very gifted, so I felt quite happy. The Lord’s eye came to me while I was praying once more, and He said, “You are gifted, but will you become useful?” That was a convicting word. It is precious that in the Christian life there is such an eye! Once we touch the Lord’s person, we often are brought to repentance due to His shining, observing, examining and judging eye upon us. At the same time, His eye comforts. Every time He judges us, He comforts us. When the judging comes, we are able to appreciate it and thank the Lord for it. He also grants leading through His burning eyes.

HAVING FEET AS REFINED BRASS: PURGING AND UNLOADING

The Lord walks among the churches having brass feet as burned in a furnace (Rev 1:15). Brass typifies judgment in the Bible. The Lord Jesus was the first One to be judged, even though He was blameless. He had to be judged because all our sins were upon Him for our sake. He was judged in our place. In

resurrection He became a resurrected King, and walks now in His judging. His judging is by no means rough, however. On the one hand, it may seem severe, but it is fine, meaning it does not go beyond our ability to bear it. Anyone who feels he must quit because the Lord seems too hard on him has not really seen this. It is not that the Lord is too hard; it is that they make it seem hard and blame the Lord for what they suffer due to their own resistance. The Lord's judgment, however, is fine. When He takes action (demonstrated by the feet) it does seem that we are going through a furnace, but the fire of the furnace is a good thing because it purges away what is negative.

I developed some bad habits when I was young. I would escape from school for an entire month, and yet still get passing grades. But eventually the Lord brought me into a "furnace". I began to see everything I had boasted in was actually shameful. Many things that appear marvelous to man become pitiful in the light of the Lord's judgment. As the Lord walks among us with His feet of burning brass, all the weight of the nonsense we carry around with us is gradually dealt with.

Human beings live in dreams. We feel we have something we can rely upon, but once the Lord brings us into the furnace, we begin to realize what we think we have cannot be trusted. Whatever you put your trust in besides the Lord shall come to nothing. The Lord planned eternity for us, but He must first search us with His eyes. If we dare not look Him in the eye, the only thing He can do is put us in a furnace. If you love money or some particular future, that hope will be purged out in the furnace until only Jesus is left. This takes place as the Lord judges us. We should not lose heart, for the Lord is with us throughout the process, and eventually we find ourselves freed from that clinging weight that we once thought was so wonderful, but which was actually only a frustration. You may know that you will lose the world if the Lord burns you, and you may wish to escape the Lord's burning because you really lied when you told the Lord you only wanted Him. But He will judge in His fineness until all the other "loves" have been burned away.

To anyone who loves Jesus I would be strong to say, "Give your life to Him!" The Lord will come to you with His searching eyes to judge and burn everything away. His feet will work to bring you into the furnace—not to burn you to ashes, but to burn everything unnecessary away. If the Lord were to let us go, could He say He loved us? His feet are like *fine* brass, not at all rough. If 200 degrees of heat is sufficient, He will not turn it up to 201, nor will he apply the 200 until He deems you ready. Once you begin to pursue the Lord, He will insure that your love toward Him will be perfected. This is why He purifies us in the church.

The Jesus John saw had a voice as the voice of many waters (Rev 1:15). On one hand that is powerful, but on the other hand, underneath the falls you can walk and find cover! That voice may shake you, but it brings you into something very peaceful in His presence. His voice comes powerfully to us, but through it He nourishes and shepherds us.

HOLDING THE MESSENGERS OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES

The seven stars He holds in His hand are the messengers of the churches (Rev 1:16; see also 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). These stars do not need to do that much for the Lord is responsible for the blessing. If in a certain place there are many such stars/messengers doing things, you know that the church is going to be blessed. It is not that such saints are necessarily spiritual; it is simply that they are held in the Lord's hand in that place.

The "messenger" of a church should be a corporate messenger. It is not their own zeal or faithfulness that holds them; they are held in the Lord's hand. We should realize we are messengers for the local churches in the Lord's hand for His testimony. We should be those who have risen up and have been raised up to bear the testimony in our localities. Such messengers have a burden: they are alive to God. If He wants to do something their feeling is, "We are here!" The Lord can speak to them (as long as they have not become too systematized). One messenger may be equipped in truth, while another messenger may be rich in experience. The Lord is after some who can be such messengers for His testimony.

When I meet with those of the second generation, I often tell them I don't trust them. They should answer, "But the Lord does!" The messengers are in the Lord's hand. He is responsible for them.

Furthermore, the messengers from one locality are held one with the messengers of other localities. Every local church answers to the Lord, but is also connected with all the other local churches. If no one visits you from another locality or none from your locality go out to visit others, something is wrong. Here we see seven messengers from seven churches being held by the Lord, but there is no designation in this description as to which messenger is for which church. This is the Body of Christ. Determine never to be isolated. Satan will do everything to destroy the fellowship we have and to cause us to become isolated, but the messengers are connected with all the local churches.

A SHARP TWO-EDGED SWORD PROCEEDING FROM HIS MOUTH: HIS DIVIDING WORD

A sword comes out of the Lord's mouth to divide (Rev 1:16; Heb. 4:12). The work of the Lord's sword brings in a clear situation, which in turn brings

about real rest. Since I first touched the Lord as a high schooler, He has continuously been carrying me into rest. Every time storms have come, He has come and divided me and brought out the bothersome element in my soul into the real rest of my spirit. How marvelous it is to love Christ! Your whole life is very different from everyone else in the world.

SHINING AS THE SUN IN ITS POWER: SOBERING IN REALIZATION

The countenance of the Lord as He appears walking among the churches is as the sun shines in its power (Rev 1:16). The sun's shining is a powerful matter. The disciples saw the same exhibition of the Lord's glory on the mount in Matthew 17. That was the Lord seen in His kingdom. When the Lord comes again, He will establish the millennial kingdom in which we will reign with Him. John experienced a soberness in the Lord's presence at that time, for he really saw the reality of what his commitment was. The Lord's appearance as He cares for the churches demonstrates how great a matter the churches are to the Lord. As a young man or woman agrees to marry, they glimpse something of the weight of that commitment. To say that person is virtuous is one thing; to become united with that person and that person's purpose is another. That is the difference between the two kinds of seeing. We are now the Lord's partners, but He is the major party. He holds the keys to death and Hades. Everyone has to die before the Lord comes, but those keys can be seen to be for our protection in setting limits and opening matters throughout our lives, not just for setting the limit upon it.

EVERYTHING THE LORD HAS BEEN, IS AND WILL BE FOR US HAS THE NEW JERUSALEM IN VIEW

When John saw the new heaven and earth and the new city New Jerusalem, it was real (Rev 21:1-2). We may feel we have a plan for our lives, but we are already in the New Jerusalem. The Lord can say of our life, "I have seen it already." How much our life is already in the Lord's hands! I am so thankful. I had no idea I would arrive at this place when I reached this age, but the Lord saw it. Where will we be? The Lord says, "I saw it." What will we become? The Lord says, "I saw it." He holds us in His hands, and He holds the keys to bring us through. He has foreseen it all. What a blessing! How we thank Him!

- Titus Chu (Ashland Woods, July 9, 2009 PM)