

The Psalms of Ascents

A Mature Testimony of Life—Producing the Church Life for Brothers to Dwell in Unity (2)

Week 10 – Monday

Acts 1:14-15; 2:41-42, 47

After the Lord prayed for the oneness of His people, He went to the cross, died, resurrected, and ascended to the heavens. Fifty days after His resurrection, He poured Himself down upon His disciples. On the night after His resurrection, the Lord came to His disciples and breathed into them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). From that moment the resurrected Christ entered into the disciples and stayed with them for forty days, appearing to them and speaking the matter of God’s kingdom. He opened the Word to them and showed them all the scriptures that are concerning Him. He opened their hearts in order for them to understand the scriptures. Then the disciples saw the Lord ascending up into a cloud outwardly and physically.

By then the disciples were prepared for His outpouring; they no longer argued who is greater. Instead they were able to pray together in oneness. One hundred and twenty of them gathered together in an upper room in Jerusalem, praying in one accord (Acts 1:14-15). After ten days, the day of Pentecost came and the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them and the church in Jerusalem was produced with 3,000 more getting saved that day (2:41). That situation was so beautiful; how good and how pleasant it was with all the saints gathering together in one accord, remaining in the teachings and fellowship of the apostles (v. 42). They were breaking bread, praying and meeting together daily and daily God was adding many to the church (v. 47). They also sold all their belongings and put all their possessions before the apostles, sharing all things together in one accord. This was the new beginning of God’s work; how good and how pleasant it was.

Later on some difficulties from man came in; the Jewish religion came in and destroyed the one accord. Satan also entered into the heart of some (Acts 5:3). Slowly the church lost the oneness. When the church was first produced, we can see how good and how pleasant it was. It was entirely according to God’s desire, but it began to decline from there. On the other hand, it began to expand to other places, first to the entire area of Judea, then to Samaria, and then into the Gentile world.

The persecution of the church began in Acts chapter 7 when Stephen was martyred. After his martyrdom, the church in Jerusalem was under great persecution and many of the disciples were scattered. All the believers were scattered except the apostles (8:1). The gospel was preached to many places because of this scattering. The persecution did not stop the spread of the gospel but rather helped it.

The Psalms of Ascents

Week 10 – Tuesday

1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:1-2; Phil. 2:2

The gospel was spreading on the east side of the Mediterranean Sea from around Judea and into Syria. This is when the church in Antioch started as the first church that was predominantly composed of Gentile believers (Acts 11:19-21). All this was the beginning work of the Spirit. The beginning of the church in Antioch was also beautiful. That was also a new beginning by the Spirit. Even though the Bible does not record all the details, we can see that that was also a very good beginning. From there the church spread when Paul and Barnabas were sent from there to preach the gospel in the Gentile lands (13:3-4). Within 15 years the gospel was preached all around the area of the Mediterranean Sea. This was a strong work of the Holy Spirit. From church history we also know that the gospel was spread to the rest of the world. Originally, it was only in Jerusalem; then it spread throughout Judea, and then to the Gentile world. From Antioch it spread to Asia Minor (Turkey), to Macedonia, and to Greece.

According to what the Spirit desires, even though the gospel spread, it should be kept in oneness. But because of different cultures and backgrounds, at that time the church did not attain to the vision that God desires for the church. So, when Paul wrote his epistles to the churches, he encouraged them to be in oneness. To the saints in Corinth he wrote, “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10). To the church in Ephesus he wrote, “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love” (Eph. 4:1-2). To the church in Philippi he wrote, “fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Phil. 2:2). All of these portions refer to Paul’s desire for the churches to remain in oneness, to have the testimony of oneness. This is what the Lord Jesus prayed for and also the burden in the apostles.

God’s purpose is for us to be one. God’s desire is for us to dwell in unity. To be in oneness is a spiritual matter; to dwell in unity is an outward expression. Since we are one in life, then we should also dwell in unity in our daily life. May this become our own burden with all of us in the church life striving for the same goal.

The Psalms of Ascents

Week 10 – Wednesday

Psa. 133:2; 2 Cor. 1:21

Psalm 133, verse 2 reads, “It is like the precious oil upon the head, Running down on the beard, The beard of Aaron, Running down on the edge of his garments.” In Exodus 30:22-30, God commanded the Israelites to make the holy anointing oil with myrrh, cinnamon, calamus and cassia mixed with olive oil. The precious oil refers to the holy ointment that was used to anoint both the tabernacle and the priests. This means that the anointing is for the church and for those who serve in the church.

When Aaron was anointed to be the high priest, he put on the high priestly garment and Moses poured the anointing oil on his head. The oil ran down upon his beard and ran down upon the hem of his garment. Here Aaron represents Christ. *Christ* means *the anointed One*. The Holy Spirit anointed Him without measure. 2 Cor. 1:21 says, “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God.” Our Lord, Christ, was anointed by God to be the high priest today. He serves in the holy temple and the real tabernacle. We are His Body and when we are joined with Him, we are also anointed in His anointing. In His ascension, God anointed Him to be the Lord and Christ. God poured the Holy Spirit upon Him. He received the promised Spirit and He poured the Spirit upon the earth, upon the beard and down to the hem of the garment. The Body and the Head are one. In this oneness, each member of the Body was also anointed by the anointing oil; the ointment joins the Head and the Body together. As long as we are joined with Christ, then the ointment will flow to us as the members of His Body. The ointment is the power of our serving life. If we want to serve the Lord, we need the anointing in our spirit that leads us to grow in life and to have a healthy church life.

When the church is in oneness, the Spirit will flow upon each brother and sister so that every one of us can rise up and serve. In other words, as long as we live in the body and dwell with the brothers in unity, the anointing oil will flow to us and also will flow to others. Every brother and sister will be anointed by the Holy Spirit and serve in a living way. Such a condition is “how good and how pleasant.”

The Psalms of Ascents

Week 10 – Thursday

Psa. 133:3 – Footnotes 3¹, 3², 3³

Psalm 133, verse 3 says, “It is like the dew of Hermon, Descending upon the mountains of Zion; For there the Lord commanded the blessing—Life forevermore.” Mount Hermon is located in the north of Palestine. It is a high mountain and fills with dew. Mount Hermon represents the heavens in the Bible; the dew represents Christ. Christ went through death and resurrection; now He ascended to the heavens. In the sphere of ascension, He is the dew. What is dew? Dew forms in a cold night. In other words, Christ went through death, resurrected, and in His ascension became the grace that refreshes us. When we dwell in unity, the dew, the rich grace from the heavens will descend upon us. We desire such abundant grace to descend upon us. Sometimes we end a letter saying, “The gracious Lord be with you all.” This is what we desire. How can we enjoy this grace? As long as we are in one accord, dwelling together in unity, then grace will come upon us. How good and how pleasant it is.

The dew is on the mountains of Zion. This is the place where the Lord rules and reigns—David’s throne is in Zion. Zion is the church that represents God’s sovereign rule on earth. When Christ can reign in the church, the saints can dwell in oneness and the ascended Christ with the riches of life from heaven will descend upon the church like dew. Every brother and sister will be filled with life, freshness, energy and power to live the church life and serve the Lord.

The result is that in the church life, we only see resurrection; every saints is a testimony of resurrection. Here we do not see our flesh, our soul life, or our natural life, but only the resurrected Christ. Oh what a church life; everyone is in resurrection and everyone is enjoying resurrection. Everyone is a testimony of the ascended Christ who supplies us the freshness of His resurrection and becomes our experience of life. Hallelujah. How good and how pleasant it is. I believe that everyone of us desires to have a church life like this, this being expressed in our church life. This is also God’s desire.

God blesses us with His eternal life, “For there the Lord commanded the blessing—Life forevermore.” In the testimony of Zion, God blessed us with His eternal life. God’s appointed blessing is His eternal life; there are no other blessings in the church except the eternal life. We need to speak to the Lord and say, “Lord, give us this reality.” We don’t need the outward excitements; we need the growth in life inwardly. We need to grow; we need to labor; and we need to mature until the mature church life can be expressed among us. “Lord, give us this reality!”

The Psalms of Ascents

Week 10 – Friday

Psa. 134

A Testimony of a Matured Life—All the Servants in the Church Are Watchful to Wait for the Lord’s Second Coming

In each locality there are a group of servants who are watching for the Lord’s coming. This is the concluding point in the Psalms of Ascents. Psalm 134 reads, “Behold, bless the LORD, All you servants of the LORD, Who by night stand in the house of the LORD! Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, And bless the LORD. The LORD who made heaven and earth Bless you from Zion!

This fifteenth psalm of ascents begins with a man who belongs to the Lord and has a heart with an inward longing for the Lord. He is willing to be delivered out of the bondage of the world, abide in the temple of God, and seek the Lord with a pure heart. This man who belongs to God walks step by step in ascension, goes through many steps, is delivered out of the bondage of the world, and is cleansed from his sins. He abides in the Lord, receives His light, and realizes that in his flesh there is nothing good. He has received the dealing of the cross and the revelations of God, and he sees God’s eternal purpose. He has experienced the breaking of the soul life so that he can have a deeper union with the Lord whom he loves. He is then able to live a body life, a church life, of brotherly love. Thus, at the conclusion of this psalm of ascents, we can see that in the church there is a group of servants raised up, serving in the presence of the Lord, and being watchful to wait for His second coming.

This is a beautiful conclusion—there is a group of servants standing in the presence of the Lord, watching and waiting for the Lord’s return. This is the group of people that God desires to gain today. Because there is a group of servants of the Lord, the church bears a testimony and experiences the anointing of the ointment and the resurrected Christ as its dew of life. The church then produces a group of corporate servants: “All you servants of the LORD, Who by night stand in the house of the LORD!” “Night” means that dawn has not arrived yet, indicating the Lord Jesus has not yet returned. What are we waiting for during the night? We wait only for the Lord’s second coming. This has been the longing of the saints in many generations, and is even more ours today.

At the end of the Bible, the Lord said, “Surely I am coming quickly” (Rev. 22:20). John’s response was, “Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”

We also have the same response. We all need to tell the Lord, “Lord, come! Oh Lord, I desire that You would come!” This has been the cry of believers through out the generations. It also needs to be our cry in these days because the Lord’s return is closer today than at any time before.

“Stand” means that a man does not rest, but rather diligently serves. “Stand in the house of the LORD!” indicates that everyone stands on a positive ground; everyone is watchful, waiting, preparing themselves to be ready in the presence of the Lord for the Lord’s return.

Spiritually speaking, we are now living in the night. But we thank and praise our Lord that His words tell us, “The night is far gone; the day is at hand” (Rom. 13:12). “Yet a little while, and our Lord will return” During this little while, we stay watchful in the house of God, standing, watching, serving, testifying for the Lord, and glorifying God.

In the night, especially late at night, some watchmen may sleep. Therefore we need to be watchful and pray. Every brother and sister must fulfill their portion to worship and serve their God in the church. We are all servants of God. The important aspect of waiting for the Lord is to be watchful. The Bible says that we don’t know when our Lord will come; perhaps you will be working in the field, grinding in the mill, or resting on your bed. No one knows when the Lord will come; even the Son does not know; only the Father knows (Matt. 24:36). So then we need to wait and be watchful.

The Psalms of Ascents

Week 10 – Saturday

1 Cor. 9:24-27

“In the house of the LORD!” means in the church life. To stand in the house of the Lord is to serve diligently in the church life. In the church life, a group of saints grows unto maturity, becoming the servants of the Lord, and crying out together, “Lord, return.” The church must be mature in order to bring the Lord back; a matured church definitely longs for the Lord’s return and is also ready to receive the Lord’s return. Although we are in the realm of resurrection and ascension and have the highest and richest enjoyment and experience of Christ our head, this experience is still a foretaste. We still need to say, “Lord, may You return.” To us, the Lord’s return becomes more beautiful, more attractive and more glorious. How good and pleasant it will be if we can live a church life like this!

Psalm 134, verse 2 reads, “Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, And bless the LORD.” The sanctuary typifies the church. “Lift up your hands” signifies prayers. In the church we are watchful to wait for the Lord’s return, praying and blessing the Lord. At the end of the Psalms of Ascents, we have a perfectly glorious testimony: matured saints lifting up their hands in the church life, praying for the Lord’s return. When we pray in such a way, we can say, “Bless the Lord.”

Verse 3 reads, “The LORD who made heaven and earth Bless you from Zion!” This is the concluding word of the Psalms of Ascents. What a conclusion! God wants to pour out His blessings to us from Zion, His throne. David declared that he desired to dwell in the house of the Lord forevermore; our desire should be the same. Throughout all our life, grace and kindness follow us, and we also abide in the temple of Jehovah forever and ever.

When we bear the Lord’s testimony in His temple, we enjoy His grace and His kindness. In the beginning of the Psalms of Ascents, we see that Jehovah our Lord made the heavens and the earth (Psalm 121:2); at the end, this same Lord who made the heavens and the earth now blesses this group of matured servants of the Lord in the church of His new creation! This blessing is the reward which He will give to His servants upon His return. In Genesis God promised many blessings to Abraham; those blessings will be given when the Lord comes again and last to eternity. These are heavenly blessings. We want to be faithful in the church life today so that we will be rewarded by the Lord when He comes again. We must desire this.

The Lord wants to reward those who serve Him faithfully so we need to seek for His reward. However, the reward is conditional; some will receive the reward and others will not receive it. This is just like graduation time from school—some receive rewards and others do not. When the Lord comes again He will reward His servants, but some will not receive the reward. This is why Paul said that he pressed on toward the goal by serving diligently for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:14). He also said that we all run in the race (1 Cor. 9:24). Why do we run in a race? In a worldly race, only one person wins the prize, but in the heavenly race we all can receive the reward. Paul also said that buffeted his body and subdued it lest he would lose his reward even though he preached the gospel to others (v. 27). Even a great apostle such as Paul realized that there was a reward set before him, but he still might not get it.

Later at the end of Paul's life when he knew that he was about to be martyred, he was clear that he had gained the reward. He said, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7-8). Paul's entire life was a race, so he buffeted and subdued his own body to run it well. In the end he knew that he had gained his reward. He is the only one in the Bible who said that he had become clear that he would get his reward. Perhaps Daniel in the Old Testament knew that he would receive a reward because the angel told him that he would arise to receive his inheritance at the end of the days (Dan. 12:13). Probably Moses and Elijah also got it because they were there speaking with the Lord on the mount of transfiguration (Matt. 17:3). Also, all the saints throughout the generations who were martyred for the Lord will gain their reward (Rev. 20:4).

We are still alive today; there is still hope for us, but we must struggle to pursue and love the Lord's appearing. Then the Lord will reward us. How joyful it is that we can be such a people! May we grow from stage to stage as portrayed in the Psalms of Ascents so that we would become the servants of the Lord who stand before Him watching and waiting for His return and who will receive His reward when He comes again. We need to encourage one another for this.