

Divine Romance - Spiritual Warfare

Message 3

Psa. 127:3-5; Acts 2:38-40; 2 Tim. 3:14-17

We are covering the matter of spiritual warfare together with the matter of the divine romance. In this message we are turning our attention to the matter of the second generation, our children. However, it is good for us to see that our raising our next generation for the Lord is actually a focal point of the spiritual battle. Psalm 127, verse 3 says, "Behold, children are the heritage of Jehovah, The fruit of the womb a reward." This means that all our children are from the Lord and all our children belong to the Lord. They are only given to us for a time for us to keep custody for Him. That is why we should do our best to raise our children for Him. He gives them to us; we give them back to Him. But the next verse says, "Like arrows in the hand of a mighty man, So are the children of one's youth." Every child is like an arrow. If you are talking about arrows, the setting must be some kind of battle. No wonder our children are a focus of the attack of the enemy. In general in any age the enemy does a particular work to try to gain the youth of that generation. It has always been like this, but it seems that it is intensified now. It was like this when we were young but today the battle is more fierce. We sang hymn 893 which says, "Conflict today is fierce." Another line says, "'Tis harder at the end the Lord to testify." It seems that as we approach the consummation of this age it is getting harder. For our children and young people especially it is harder and harder to be a testimony for the Lord in this age. But each of our children is like an arrow in the hand of a mighty man.

"Blessed is the man Who fills his quiver with them" (v. 5). A quiver is a container for the arrows; we should have a quiver full of arrows. Sorry, I only have 3 arrows. I met a brother last night who said he had 11 arrows. When I asked how many grandchildren, he had to think, "Is it 43 or 44?" Imagine if each one grows up for the Lord, what a defeat that would be to the enemy. So the enemy will try to attack our children. We expect that our children and grandchildren who are here with us will be the ones to consummate this age, to see the Lord return. I believe that the children who are with us today will see the Lord return. So when you are serving them in the nursery or have them at home, I hope that you see them as little arrows that intimidate the enemy. "Blessed is the man Who fills his quiver with them. He will not be put to shame When he speaks with enemies in the gate." Our children are part of the spiritual warfare.

Acts chapter 2 is very particular in our history; it is the beginning of the church. On the night of the Lord's resurrection He breathed into the disciples. You could say that the church was brought forth that night because we were regenerated in the Lord's resurrection, but officially we need to take Acts chapter 2 when the Spirit was poured out on the Body on the day of Pentecost as the time when the church was formed. That day the children are mentioned. I read these verses many times, but never noticed that on the first day of the church God paid attention to the children. Peter was preaching the gospel "And when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, What should we do, brothers? And Peter said to them, Repent and each one of you be baptized upon the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For to you is the promise and to your children" (vv. 37-39a). The promise is to you and to your children.

Verse 39 continues, “And to all who are far off”. Many brothers have a burden for the gospel but their first attention is to those who are far off. They are burdened for coworkers; they are burdened for students; they are burdened to preach the gospel to the community. That is wonderful but don’t ignore your children. First the gospel is to you and to your children, then to those who are far off. It is not written with a comma between *you and your children*; the comma is before *those who are far off*. This indicates that there is a priority; the first ones we must be burdened for are our children. The church must always have the burden for the gospel, but first to the children. Satan is afraid of the increase of God’s people; he fears the increase of God’s people. Where does our increase come from? From our children and from preaching the gospel to those outside, always from these two sources. Both Brother Nee in his ministry and Brother Lee in his ministry said strongly that our increase should be 50% from each of these sources. However, with many of the churches most of the increase is from outside. You have a very unique opportunity here because the Lord is blessing you with so many children. The only places that I have seen this fulfilled is in the Philippines and Belize which have 50% increase from inside and from outside. I hope that all the churches would pay attention to this matter.

The Old Testament is book of pictures. First Corinthians chapter 10, verse 6 says that everything that happened to Israel is a picture, a type, of us and an example for us. Verse 11 says, “Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our admonition, unto whom the ends of the ages have come.” Things happened to them many ages ago and were written down as examples to us and were given as an admonition to us. Who are we? We are the ones to whom the end of the ages have come. We at the end of the age must look at the Old Testament picture to learn Satan’s strategy. God exposes Satan’s schemes in His Word and we can learn the lessons.

We can especially learn something from the book of Exodus. Exodus is a very particular book because it shows our history in picture form. What do you see in the first page of Exodus? God’s people in bondage. Then God sends a saviour, Moses. How are they saved? By a lamb and by a sea. That typifies our salvation because Jesus is the Lamb of God and our baptism. First Corinthians 10:2 says that they all were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea. This verse equates the crossing of the Red Sea with baptism. Then they go into the wilderness and what happens there? They receive God’s supply, God’s provision, consisting of the bread from heaven and the water from the rock. Both of these are pictures of Christ. Actually, 1 Corinthians 10 does not say that the rock was a picture of Christ; it says that the rock was Christ. I don’t know what that means but for us Christ is the bread that comes down from heaven, the manna, and He is the flowing river. So there we have the bondage, salvation and supply. Then God brings them to the mountain and reveals Himself to them. He shows them not only the law, but also the blueprint for His house. So here we have the revelation of God Himself through the law and the desire of His heart, His tabernacle. For us, this is the revelation of Christ and the church. Then how does the book end? It ends with the children of Israel erecting the tabernacle and the glory of God filling it. That is our destiny.

I want us to pay attention to the first section of Exodus. Chapter 1, verses 8 and 9 say, “And a new king rose up over Egypt, who did not know of Joseph. And he said to his people, The people of the children of Israel are now more numerous and stronger than we.” If you go back one page in your Bible, how many children of Israel were there in Genesis 50? Seventy, sixty-six came out of the good land. There is the touching story of the brothers coming to Egypt to buy food and meeting Joseph. Then he told them to bring their brother and eventually they all come to Egypt. Joseph also gained a wife and two children in Egypt to make a total of seventy. When you turn the page, there

are about two million children of Israel. Four hundred years had passed with no record of what happened during that time. Do you know what happened? Increase, lots of children, children having children. By then Pharaoh was threatened by the children of Israel because he realized that they were more numerous and stronger than the Egyptians. Then he made a plan because he was threatened by their increase: "Come, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply and, when some war occurs, they also join themselves to those who hate us and fight against us and go up from the land. So they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens.... But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out so that they came to dread the children of Israel. And the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with harshness" (vv. 10-13). This is just the first part of the plot. Pharaoh wanted to put down the children of Israel so he decided that he would do this in two steps. The first step was to wear down the older generation, to make the ones who work, work even harder to get them exhausted so that they don't have any energy left for the worship of God nor to fight. They wouldn't have strength to worship or to fight.

That strategy was toward the older generation. He had a different strategy in the following verses toward the younger generation that was more insidious, more harsh. "When the babies are born, if it is a boy, kill it." The firstborn boys were all to be killed. Can you imagine if there was a king or some leader in some nation today who would make this decree? The whole world would rise up against them. But Pharaoh did this; this is a picture of Satan. What does this show us? This shows us Satan's attitude toward our children, especially the boys. "And they made their lives bitter with hard labor in mortar and in brick and in all kinds of labor in the field; all their labor with which they made them serve was with harshness. And the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one whose name was Shiphrah and the other whose name was Puah" (vv. 14-15). I never heard of anyone naming their daughter Shiphrah or Puah. These are great names in the Bible; these two sisters were the real saviours of Israel before Moses. Actually, the saviour, Moses, needed a saviour. There were four sisters who saved Moses: these two and his mother and older sister. Hebrews 11 tells us that his father was also involved (v. 23) but Exodus only mentions the sisters.

"And he said, When you act as midwives for the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live. But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them but let the male children live" (vv. 16-17). These midwives are a picture of all our sisters, especially all our serving sisters. Sisters, especially if you serve with the children you could be the saviour of our children; you could save the nation of Israel. Suppose the midwives had carried out what Pharaoh commanded and slain the boys but let the girls live, who would the girls marry when they grew up? It would need to be the Egyptians. So in the picture they would be mingled with the world right away. In one generation there would no more pure Israel. I have observed over the years that in many of the local churches the boys among us no longer have much interest in the things of the Lord when they get to a certain age. This is more common among the boys than among the girls. There may be exceptions here and there, but what you see here is what we experience. Then when the sisters want to get married, I have observed that more of our daughters go outside to seek a companion even when there are brothers available. They seek a husband among the unbelievers; what we see in Exodus 1 is fulfilled even today. We need more Shiphrahs and Puahs to rescue our next generation.

Later God sent Moses and Aaron to tell Pharaoh, "Let my people go" and they had rounds of conflict. Then Exodus 10, verses 8 to 10 say, "So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh, and he said to them, Go, serve Jehovah your God. But who exactly are going? And Moses said, We

will go with our young and with our old; we will go with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds, for we must hold Jehovah's feast. And he said to them, Let Jehovah indeed be with you if I ever let you go with your little ones as well." Pharoah was saying, "OK, you go worship Jehovah, but I will never let your children go!" This is showing us Satan's attitude toward our little ones. If we apply the Passover lamb as Jesus, if we apply the manna as Him as our supply, if we apply the Red Sea as baptism, we have to apply this too. Do you see the attitude? Why does Satan fear the little ones? Because they are like the arrows, especially at the end of the age these little ones could be the ones to bring the Lord back.

Exodus chapter 12 talks about the Passover. "And you shall observe this matter as a statute for you and for your sons in perpetuity. And when you come to the land which Jehovah will give you, as He has promised, you shall observe this service. And when your children say to you, What does this service mean to you? You shall say, It is the passover sacrifice to Jehovah, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians and delivered our houses. And the people bowed and worshipped" (vv. 24-27). I want to point out that on the evening of the passover, a lamb was slain in every home. Slaying the lamb and applying the blood was the function of whom in the Old Testament? That is what priests do. Do you realize that on the night of the passover there were priests in every home? Who were the priests? The parents.

Later God expresses His desire saying that He brought them on eagles' wings to be a kingdom of priests (19:4-6), but Israel lost this privilege by worshipping the golden calf in Exodus 32. Because of that, only one tribe, the Levites who came and answered Moses call, could be priests. I would say that the closest God ever got to having a kingdom of priests was on the night of the passover. But who were the priests? The parents. We cannot depend on the church for the raising of our children. The church can help and will help, but the first responsibility is with all of us as the parents. We should be those who bring our children to salvation, or at least have the desire to bring our children to salvation.

Exodus 12:26 says, "And when your children say to you, What does this service mean to you?" The children of Israel were to speak about the passover to their children in perpetuity, year after year. In years to come there would certainly be a generation that was not born yet when they crossed the Red Sea. So they would not know about coming out of Egypt; they were born in the good land. They might have heard of their grandparents coming out of Egypt but now they see their parents slaying another lamb. Don't you think that some of the children would ask, "Daddy, what are you doing? What does this mean?" When they ask, does it say, "You shall take your children to children's meeting and they will explain everything to them"? Of course, it does not say that. "You will invite sister Miriam to give a lesson to all the children." It doesn't say that. What does it say? "You shall say...." The charge to every parent is to be a priest, a prophet, and a teacher. That is our job, our function, for our children.

I would like to give you a few words to guide the remainder of our fellowship. If you are talking about caring for children, and especially caring for young people, teenagers all the way through college age, the number one thing, the top thing, is shepherding. We need to be their shepherds. So the first word I want to emphasize is *shepherding*. There is a small booklet that I would like to recommend called *How to Lead the Young People*. It is just one message but how much benefit I have received in my service in caring for the young people since I read that booklet. It has helped me even in caring for my own children. This little booklet has fellowship concerning six points. I am only going to mention a few of them. The first point is showing interest in them. We need to contact them and know them and also to study the age. We need to understand the age that our

children are growing up in. Many parents are short in this area; they have not kept up with the age perhaps because things are moving too fast and there are many terms that they do not understand. In this it is good to have fellowship in the body; the church can really help. But the age that our children are growing up in is very different than the age that we grew up in. There are many things and influences on the young people, so we need to walk along side them. This is easy to do when the children are small because the children are saying, “Mommy, mommy, look.” One day that stops; did you notice? Does it stop when they are seven or eight? But somewhere along the line you need to go to them and ask, “Hi, what are you doing?” Sometimes when the children are playing on the floor, mommies and daddies come and sit down next to them and ask, “What are you doing?” They may say, “I am building a plane.” They may be using Lego to build something. It doesn’t look like a plane but you say, “What a beautiful plane” and just talk to them. When they are seven, and especially when they are thirteen, it is a little more of a challenge. However, it will be less of a challenge if you have been doing that every day of their lives, or at least every week. This is to stay in contact.

The second word I would like to give is *reaching* people. This is a big part of our shepherding. In our shepherding we need to reach people. Especially, we need to reach their hearts. Paul says in First Thessalonians, “You know what kind of entrance we had toward you” (1:9). When Paul and the brothers went to Thessalonica and contacted people there, somehow within less than three weeks they found an entrance into the hearts of these people. We need to find an entrance into the hearts of our children. When they are very young it is easy to have an entrance because there is no door, just a big opening because they depend on you for everything. Somewhere along the way a door appears there. Then for you to get into your child’s heart, they need to open the door. Do you have the key to your child’s heart? You need to pray for this. I hope that all the younger parents among us with young children would exercise to keep this door open by showing interest, by reaching them.

There are two examples in the scriptures that I feel are absolutely the best examples of shepherding. I just love coming to these chapters and I cannot exhaust what I see here. They are Luke 24 and John 21. These are the final two chapters of these two books. Luke 24 starting from verse 13 is speaking of something on the day of the Lord’s resurrection. The first few verses of this chapter tell of the sisters going to the tomb and finding out that the Lord resurrected. Then they go back and tell the brothers, and Peter runs and sees that the Lord is not there. They are marvelling and somewhat confused. Some believe and some don’t believe: “He said that He would resurrect, but I can’t believe it.” Sometimes we are too hard on these brothers and sisters because we all believe in the resurrection, but this was brand new to them. So two of them, probably discouraged, were leaving Jerusalem to go home.

Verse 13 says, “And behold, two of them were going on the same day to a village named Emmaus, which was sixty stadia away from Jerusalem.” Sixty stadia is 11 kilometres, a long way. They were going and talking to each other about all these things, then: “And while they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself drew near and went with them” (v. 15). Do you think that they were walking fast? I don’t think so because they were sad; when you are sad you don’t walk fast. They were confused and then all of a sudden Jesus was with them but they didn’t recognize Him. This is hard to understand. This is the first principle of shepherding. When you go to shepherd someone, they should not recognize that you are shepherding them. You should not tell them, “Hey, I am here to shepherd you. I am here to save you and take care of you. Open your heart to me.” Don’t do that;

they will probably not talk to you for a year. You need to be incognito; you need to be very human. The Lord was resurrected; you would think that He would have some kind of aura about Him. No, He looked just like a man, very ordinary. He was walking with them but their eyes were kept from recognizing Him.

Verse 17 says, “And He said to them, What are these words which you are exchanging with one another while you are walking? And they stood still, looking sad.” He asked, “What are these words?” Did He not know what these words were? Did He forget that He got resurrected? Whenever God asks a question it is not necessary. There is no question that God could ask that He does not know the answer to before He asks the question, so why does He ask the question? In Genesis 3 God asked, “Adam, where are you?” Do you think that God was thinking, “Where did I put that man?” No, He knew where Adam was but He still asked, “Adam, where are you?” We do this when we are playing with children, “Where are you?” (She’s right there.) “Where are you? I can’t find you.” God was playing a little bit. “What are these words?” Then look at the answer: “And one of them, Cleopas by name, answered and said to Him, Do You alone dwell as a stranger in Jerusalem and not know the things which have taken place in it in these days?” That is a little condescending; I don’t like his attitude here. It is as if he was saying, “Where are you from?” And Jesus is there; what does He say in the next verse? “What things?” Can you believe that this is our Lord? This is the best shepherding. When you go to people, ask the proper questions. The proper question is not, “Did you read the Bible this week? Did you have morning watch?” Those are not the proper questions. “Are you coming to the meeting on Saturday?” No, that is not the proper question. You have to touch whatever is in their heart. That is the proper question. It is not easy sometimes to ask the proper question. Sometimes we ask the improper question and make it worse than before. It would have been better if we had not visited that person.

Then they said to Him, “The things concerning Jesus...” Eventually the Lord starts to say something. Later in the story they say, “Was not our heart burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road.” This happened even before they recognized the Lord. He started to minister something to them and their hearts were burning. Do you see? You reach their heart. First you reach them and walk with them at their pace. Eleven kilometres—how long was this talk? We read and it is about ten verses, but these ten verses took eleven kilometres. Of course, we don’t know exactly where He joined them. Even if it was half way, can you imagine Jesus walking five and a half kilometres? But He did!

Verse 28 says, “And they drew near to the village where they were going, and He acted as though He would go farther.” Can you imagine our Lord doing this? They must have come to a kind of fork in the road or they arrived at the place and He said, “Oh, you are here. It was nice talking to you. Bye, bye.” Then they said, “No, no, won’t you come to stay with us?” Then He responds, “I wouldn’t want to impose.” Of course, it doesn’t say that but with a little sanctified imagination, you could understand that probably He did say something like this. “No, no, please, just a little while. It is not an imposition.” “I don’t know. Well...” Where was He going? Actually He wanted to get into their home, unveil Himself to them, then go that evening back to Jerusalem, walk through that wall, appear to all the disciples, and then breathe into them, telling them “Receive the Holy Spirit.” John 20 follows this story. That is what He wanted to do. He wanted those two disciples in that meeting, but He never talks about the meeting. He never rebukes them, well only a little rebuke: “Foolish and slow of heart to believe”, but it was tender. Do you see the shepherding here? There

was even some divine, human acting to go along with them in their situation.

In John 21 the disciples went fishing. Peter says, “I am going fishing.” In the chapter before the Lord breathed on them. Now they have the Spirit within, and Peter gets bored or he doesn’t know where the next meal will come from. I don’t know what the situation was but anyway, he goes fishing. They catch nothing after fishing all night, and then what happens? Jesus was on the shore in the morning but they don’t recognize Him. Again, this is the first principle of shepherding. He said, “Little children, you don’t have anything to eat, do you?” Since they were in the water, maybe He called out loudly. They were in the boat. Now picture this; suppose you were one of the disciples in the boat. They may have turned and said, “Who is this guy?” Don’t you think that someone asked that? I am pretty sure someone asked, “Who is this guy and why doesn’t he mind his own business?” Jesus then told them, “Why don’t you put your net on the other side of the boat?” These were experienced fishermen; I don’t believe their boat was that wide. What difference would it make which side they were fishing on. I am pretty sure that they said, “Just do it; maybe he will go away.” So they put it on the other side and caught 153 large fish. Why 153? That is a good point too but for another day. As soon as they hauled in the fish, John said, “It is the Lord.” Then Peter put on something because he was naked and jumped into the water. When they get to the shore, Jesus says, “Come and have breakfast.” This was His shepherding. There was a fire there. I think that the fire was not only for cooking but also for Peter. He had been in the water and may have been a little cold so could warm himself up a little. Do you see the shepherding here? I think that these two chapters show the best examples of shepherding. In 1 Peter 5 Peter told the elders, “Don’t lord it over the saints, over the flock, but shepherd according to God.” How can you shepherd according to God? Look at these two chapters. That is how to shepherd; this is how we reach people’s hearts.

I want to give you another word—*relevant*. We have many deep truths that we are blessed with. We know a lot about God’s purpose, but saints, when we minister to people, especially the young people, we have to make all the truths relevant to where they are. We need to apply them. There is another writing that I would like to recommend related to the Summer School of Truth material. It is just a little book, four messages, called *Teachers’ Training*. Don’t get thrown off saying, “I am not one of the teachers; I don’t serve the young people.” The fellowship in this book will help all of us. Four short messages in which Brother Lee emphasizes the matter of reaching the young people with the word of God. He uses two phrases: We need to convert doctrine to experience and we need to leave the young people with an experiential impression, an impression that the truth we are teaching is very practical no matter how high it is, and it applies to where they are.

Recently we had a young people’s conference in the north-eastern United States for the local churches for the states from Virginia to Maine. We had it in the campground in upstate New York that we bought. Out of the burden of being relevant and reaching them, we conducted an anonymous survey and asked a few questions. We asked, “What do you think are the biggest issues that young people are facing today in America?” We asked them to write three things. It was very interesting to see their perspective and also interesting to see the perspective of the older high schoolers in contrast to the younger high schoolers, and the perspective of the brothers in contrast to the sisters. I was very struck that both the boys and girls of the older high schoolers had almost the same answer. I was a little surprised by that. Second, we asked, “What are the biggest issues that kids in your school face?” That could be very different. What happens in the country is one thing but it could be very different if you are in a big city like New York or Philadelphia, or if you are in suburbs. But

these answers with the high school young people were all the same. They told us that from their perspective the biggest issues are drugs and alcohol. The next issue is depression. Down the list and not as high as I expected was dealing with the issue of homosexuality. I thought that that was going to appear higher on the list. They said that these things were issues in America in general and also in their school.

Then we asked, “What is the one biggest issue that you are facing?” Of course, this was anonymous. Many of them, particularly the older high schoolers, talked about pressure, anxiety, thinking about their future, what school they were going to go to, choosing a major, choosing a career—all these kinds of things. There was a list of 25 different things that they mentioned, but these were by far the most popular ones for both the boys and the girls. So, we encouraged the serving saints, “Please pay attention to this. You may think, ‘Our young people, thank the Lord, don’t have issues with drugs, alcohol, or depression.’ But if in their anxiety about facing the future we don’t help them and come to counsel them, they will look to those things to answer the need.” Even just the stress of staying awake all night to do some work or some last minute paper, might make some vulnerable to a temptation. After we did this little survey, in one meeting toward the end of the conference, I spoke a little word concerning their responses. At the end of that meeting the young people lined up, quite a number of them gave us their honest testimony of being 15 years old and being offered drugs on the school bus and how they dealt with that. They had to change the way they were with people. Oh, the temptations facing our young people!

Then we asked them, “If you could change one thing in your young people’s meeting, what would it be?” The answers were also very interesting. We asked, “What would you like the serving saints to cover in your young people’s meeting?” When we asked the high schoolers, “What would you like to change?” I had something in my mind about what they might answer, but by far they answered, “We would like the meeting to be more mutual so that we could know one another better. Especially, we want to get to know the serving ones better. So can we have more contact outside the meetings? Things like outings, not for fun but to get to know the serving saints in a more human way and to have something to which invite our friends who have stopped meeting.” That is what is on their hearts. I was so touched by these answers. They are so concerned for the ones who haven’t been with us for some time. And to my great surprise, they are longing to know the serving saints. In the meeting setting you can’t do that.

Then concerning the topics, most of them did not give actual topics; mostly they said, “We just want the topics to be relevant.” That is the word they used. They wanted something that they could apply to themselves today. The last two things were: “What is your biggest obstacle in following the Lord?” and “What is your biggest obstacle in preaching the gospel?” When the young people have the way to answer honestly and we can know them, then we can give them help, we can reach them. Actually, all of this is just talking about communication; we need to be able to have the proper communication. I come back to the Lord’s example: asking the proper question. We are in the midst of a warfare and the enemy zeros in on our next generation. We need to corporately rise up and guard them, but our guarding is not by just giving them Bible knowledge. We surely need to do that in its measure and we need to avoid as much as we can premature knowledge because that damages. But actually we need to gain their hearts and that comes by being Jesusly human.

Watchman Nee has a very good chapter on the matter of parenting in the books entitled *Messages for Building Up New Believers*. One section of that chapter talks about building up an

atmosphere of love in every family. He stresses that in our family, when the children fail there should be an atmosphere that they can come to us and confess, even that we would be the first one that they tell. Then when they have a success, we would be the first one that they tell. But in many homes we build up an atmosphere of a judge; especially the dad is like a judge with a gavel. When the children come it is like coming in front of a judge: "Yes, you honour." We need to shepherd according to God. I think that the way we see the Lord interacting with people, not just in the two chapters I spoke about but in all the gospels, we could pick up a lot concerning how to shepherd.