Exploring the Bible—Gospel of John (13)

A House of Feasting

**Scripture Reading:**

1 Then Jesus, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 Therefore they made Him a supper there; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of the ones reclining at table with Him. 3 Then Mary took a pound of ointment, of very valuable pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. 4 But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was about to betray Him, said, 5 Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor? 6 But he said this not because it mattered to him concerning the poor, but because he was a thief, and holding the purse, carried off what was put into it. 7 Then Jesus said, Leave her alone; she has reserved it for the day of My burial. 8 For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have Me. (John 12:1-8)

**Ministry Reading:**

In the church life there are different functions. There are three kinds of functions in the service of the church represented by the three persons in the house. Firstly is the serving function represented by Martha (12:2). In the church service, the business affairs of the church must be taken care of. How could we have the food taken care of without Martha? We need her to prepare the food. I appreciate Martha’s service. We should encourage the sisters to be Marthas. Suppose all the sisters are Marys sitting there quietly being spiritual. Who is going to prepare the meal? We must have some Marthas who are diligent, capable, active, living, and practical. Although we are spiritual, we must still serve practically. Martha’s service was needed in that house.

The second kind of function in the service of the church is represented by Lazarus. It appears as if Lazarus did nothing. He just sat there at the table with the Lord, enjoying the feast with Him. But we must remember that Lazarus was the living testimony of the resurrection life. He did not testify by doing but by living in the resurrection life. His testimony was not in labor or in works; it was in the enjoyment of the resurrection life. He was a witness to the power of the Lord’s resurrection life. Wherever he was, the testimony of resurrection life was there. It is not by laboring; it is by enjoying the Lord. It gives people the feeling of resurrection power, the manifestation of resurrection life, and the enjoyment of the Lord as life. This is a strong testimony that the Lord can make dead persons so living and enable them to feast with Him. In the church there must be such a living testimony, such a function of life. There must be not only the service of practical affairs but also the ministry of life. Martha’s service is necessary, but Lazarus’s ministry is even more necessary.

Mary represents the third kind of function (12:2-3). She represents the dear ones who love the Lord very much and who pour out what they hold most precious upon the Lord. They love the Lord so much that they give the best to the Lord. This is what Mary did. She poured the costly ointment upon the feet of the Lord and wiped His feet with her hair. In her heart nothing was so dear, so precious, and so costly as the Lord. She, along with many others like her, loved the Lord with the best she had. Her estimate of the Lord was that He was more valuable and lovable than anything else. For her, the Lord was the most precious and the most costly One.

Mary’s pouring the precious ointment upon the Lord Jesus is a sign of the proper church life. Although you may realize that Mary anointed the Lord Jesus with the best ointment, perhaps you have not seen that this is a sign of the church life. The main characteristic of the church life is anointing the Lord with our best love. The main expression, aspect, and characteristic of the church life is that we pour out our ointment upon Him. The church here is likened to a house that is filled with the preciousness, the sweetness, and the pleasantness of the aroma of the ointment poured out upon the Lord Jesus. This ought to be the main expression of a local church. When you come into a local church, the first thing that you should smell is the loving ointment poured out upon the Lord Jesus. It is not simply that Mary loved the Lord, but that she poured out her best upon the Lord, and this becomes a sign of the proper church life. In the proper church life we all must love the Lord to such an extent.

Therefore, we have three kinds of functions: serving, testifying, and loving. We have the service, the testimony, and the love poured out upon the Lord. These three items must be found in the church life. Whenever people come to us, they must realize that among us are the service for the Lord, the testimony of the Lord, and the love poured out upon the Lord. These three items are a must. We must have the service, serving all the time. Even more, we must have the testimony, testifying that the Lord is the resurrection life to us. There is no need for us to labor in this aspect of the testimony. We simply need resurrection life. After we have been resurrected with Him, it is unnecessary for us to labor. We simply sit with Him, go along with Him, and enjoy the feast with Him. This is the real, living testimony that the church must have, and this is the very expression of the Lord. Moreover, we must also have the absolute love shown to the Lord. When people come into our midst, they should say, “Oh, these people love the Lord at any cost. They will pay any price in loving the Lord. In their hearts nothing is so costly, so valuable, so lovable, and so precious as the Lord Himself.” We must give people this kind of impression.

**Practice or Application:**

THE MEANING OF WITNESSING

How long will the light of a candle last? Of course, the light will go out when the candle burns out. But if we light another candle with this one, the light will double in intensity. Will the light of the first candle diminish because it has lit the second? No. If we use the second to light a third, will the light of the second diminish? No. The light of each candle will last until the candle burns out. But when the first light goes out, the second will still be burning. When the second light goes out, the third will still go on shining. If we keep on lighting more candles—ten, a hundred, or a thousand candles—the light will never go out. This explains the testimony of the church. When the Son of God was on earth, He lit the first candle. After that, more candles were lit one after another. For the past centuries, the church has been like candles; when one candle burns out, it is continued by another one. This goes on and on even today. The church has never ceased shining on this earth, just as salvation has never stopped. Candle after candle has been lit, and the light continues on.

Brothers and sisters, do you want your light to continue, or do you want to see it end when your candle is extinguished? You have been lit by someone. He does not expect the light to end with you. Every Christian must try his best to bring salvation to others. He must do his best to testify to others and lead others to the Lord so that the testimony may continue on this earth from generation to generation. It is unfortunate that with some people their light ends and their testimony ceases. This is most pitiful!

What is witnessing? In Acts 22:15 the Lord sent Ananias to speak to Paul: "For you will be a witness to Him unto all men of the things which you have seen and heard." From this we see that the basis of witnessing is what we have seen and heard. You cannot be a witness to what you have not seen with your own eyes or heard with your own ears. Paul saw something with his own eyes and heard something with his own ears. God charged him to be a witness of what he had seen with his own eyes and heard with his own ears. Thank God, you have believed in the Lord. You have met Him, believed in Him, received Him, and gained Him. You are saved. You have been delivered from sins, received forgiveness, and obtained peace. Now that you have believed in the Lord, what joy you possess. This joy is something which you did not have before. Formerly, how heavy was the load of sin upon you! But now, thank God, this load of sin is gone. You have seen and heard something. What should you do today? You should testify of your experience.

Question for Discussion: Have you ever tried to testify in front of your friends? Share with one another your experience and discuss any difficulties you encountered..

Reference: Life-Study of John, Msg. 25