

**Outline of
the Messages for the Full-time Training
in the Fall Term of 2005**

**GENERAL SUBJECT:
THE OVERCOMING LIFE AS PORTRAYED IN SONG OF SONGS**

Message Six

**Overcoming in the Second Stage
(3)**

**Experiencing the Cross
to Be Delivered from the Self for the Body of Christ**

Scripture Reading: S. S. 2:14-15; Rom. 6:6; Matt. 16:24; Phil. 3:10; Eph. 2:16; Psa. 43:4a

I. “My dove, in the clefts of the rock, / In the covert of the precipice, / Let me see your countenance, / Let me hear your voice; / For your voice is sweet, / And your countenance is lovely”—S. S. 2:14:

- A. Christ wants His lover to remain in the cross, that is, to stay in “the clefts of the rock” and in “the covert of the precipice”—v. 14a:
 - 1. In the New Testament, the primary meaning of the cross is not to suffer but to be put to death—2 Cor. 4:10-12; *Hymns*, #622.
 - 2. Christ wants us to remain in a crucified condition all the time—Phil. 3:10.
- B. The work of the cross in dealing with the self has three aspects:
 - 1. We need to have the revelation that our old man was crucified with Christ—Rom. 6:6; 2 Cor. 5:14.
 - 2. We need to recognize, realize, and accept the accomplished fact that we have already been crucified—Rom. 6:11; Gal. 2:20.
 - 3. We need to apply to ourselves the death of Christ that He has accomplished and that we have recognized; this is the correct meaning of bearing the cross—Matt. 16:24; Gal. 5:24:
 - a. The application must be carried out in the Spirit and by the Spirit—Rom. 8:13.
 - b. When we are living and walking in the Spirit, the Spirit applies the death of Christ to us—Gal. 5:16, 25.
- C. To be conformed to Christ’s death is to take Christ’s death as the mold of our life—Phil. 3:10:
 - 1. God has put us into the mold of Christ’s death, and day by day God is molding us to be conformed to this death—Rom. 6:3-4.
 - 2. Our life should be conformed to such a mold—dying to our human life in order to live the divine life—Gal. 2:20; 2 Cor. 4:10-11.
 - 3. If we allow our circumstances to press us into this mold, our daily life will be molded into the form of Christ’s death—Rom. 8:28-29.

II. “Catch the foxes for us, / The little foxes, / That ruin the vineyards / While our vineyards are in blossom”—S. S. 2:15:

- A. Christ calls His lover to be aware of her peculiarities, habit, and introspection (little foxes) which ruin the resurrection for His lover (our vineyards in blossom).
- B. Our natural man is biased and warped and is expressed mainly in our peculiarity—Acts 13:13; 3 John 9-10:
 - 1. Peculiarity is the ultimate expression of our natural being, the last and final expression of our natural life.
 - 2. Peculiarity is the strongest controller and director of our being—cf. Prov. 21:1.
 - 3. Our peculiarity is a hidden factor within us that frustrates us from experiencing Christ and living Christ—cf. Phil. 1:19-21a.
 - 4. The ground within us for Christ has been subtly and hiddenly usurped and possessed by our peculiarity; thus, peculiarity is a terrible antichrist in our being—cf. Eph. 3:16-17a.
 - 5. The divisive factor within us is our peculiarity; it is the root of all outward division—Acts 15:36-39.
- C. We are delivered from peculiarity by the cross; whenever we are willing to have our self with our peculiarity crucified, resurrection will follow—Matt. 16:24; S. S. 2:11-13.

III. We are “in one Body...through the cross”—Eph. 2:16:

- A. The Body is versus the self; the enemy of the Body is the self—Col. 2:18-19, 23:
 - 1. The hindrance to seeing the vision of the Body and to practicing the Body is the self—vv. 18, 23.
 - 2. The greatest frustration to the building up of the Body is the self—Matt. 16:18, 24.
 - 3. If we would be built up in the Body, the self must be condemned, denied, rejected, and renounced—Luke 9:23-24.
- B. The work of the cross consummates with the Body and ushers us into the Body—Eph. 2:16; Rom. 6:6; 8:13; 12:4-5:
 - 1. The cross brings us into the Body, and it operates in the sphere of the Body; the Body becomes the realm in which the cross works—Eph. 2:16.
 - 2. The restriction of the Body will take away our freedom and drive us to the cross.
 - 3. Only when our self has been utterly dealt with by the cross are we able to touch the reality of the life of the Body and come to know the Body—Matt. 16:24-25; Rom. 8:13; 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 1:18, 23; 2:2; 12:12, 27.

IV. “I will go to the altar of God, / To God my exceeding joy”—Psa. 43:4a:

- A. The altar, the cross, is the center of the universe—Ezek. 43:13-27.
- B. Since the cross occupies a central place in our relationship with God, we cannot avoid it; we all need to come to the point where we know and accept the cross—Gal. 6:14; Matt. 16:24.
- C. Although we meet the cross everywhere in our Christian life, we experience the cross in a particular way when we come to the altar at the center of God’s building—Eph. 2:15, 21-22.
- D. Through the experience of the cross, we are brought into the reality of the church life—Matt. 16:18, 24.

THE CROSS—THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE

No matter which gate we take to enter the compound, eventually we will come to the altar. There is no exception; the altar is unavoidable. We have all come in through the wonderful God-man, who was crucified and who is now in resurrection. If we want to meet God, we must come to the altar.

The altar is at the center of the compound. The altar is the center not only of the inner court but also of the whole premises of the temple.

This altar, which signifies the cross, is actually the center of the universe. As far as the relationship between man and God is concerned, the earth is the center. The center of the inhabited earth is the good land of Canaan, Palestine, for it is the connecting center that connects the continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa. The city of Jerusalem is the center of the good land; the temple compound is the center of Jerusalem; and the altar is the center of the temple compound. Thus, ultimately the altar is the center of the universe. Since the altar signifies the cross, this means that the cross is the center of the universe.

It is crucial for us to know the full significance of the cross. According to superficial Christian teachings, the cross is the place where the Lord Jesus died for us. This is surely true, but the cross means much more than this. As the center of the universe, the cross signifies the all-inclusive death of God, of man, and of all the creatures. The death of the Lord Jesus on the cross was not the death merely of one single person; it was an all-inclusive death involving God, man, and all the creatures.

When God comes from the temple to meet man, He likewise arrives at the altar. Therefore, the altar is not only the center of the universe but also the meeting place of God with man and of man with God. If one person comes in through the north gate and another enters through the south gate, both will eventually meet God and each other at the altar.

God came out of His dwelling place and went to the cross and died there. First, He left His dwelling place and was born in Bethlehem. After living on earth for thirty-three and a half years, He went to the altar, to the cross. As He was dying there, He was not alone. Through His incarnation He had put man upon Himself. Hence, as He was dying on the cross, man was also dying there. This indicates that God and man met together on the cross in the way of death.

God, however, cannot be affected by death. No matter how much death He passes through, He remains the same. Death actually helps Him to be released. God came out of His dwelling place and went to the cross and died there in order to release what was in Him. We may use a grain of wheat as an illustration. When a grain of wheat is sown into the earth, it dies. Is this death terrible or is it wonderful? We should say that the death of a grain of wheat is wonderful, because without this death all the riches and beautiful things in the grain cannot be released. For this reason, the death of a grain of wheat is not terrible but wonderful. In the same principle, death is wonderful to God. The Lord Jesus said, "Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). He was speaking of Himself as the one grain who would fall into the ground and die in order to be multiplied into many grains. By His death the riches of the divine life within Him were released. Because God is life, even resurrection, He cannot be terminated by death. Whatever is of man can be terminated, but whatever is of God is released through death. Now we can see that when God went to the altar, the cross, and died there, His life was released.

When the Lord Jesus died, man also died, and this death meant the termination of man. All the negative things related to man were terminated on the cross. Praise the Lord that we all were terminated on the cross! By the all-inclusive death of the Lord Jesus on the cross, all the riches of God were released. The death of Christ on the cross was a wonderful release to God and a wonderful termination to us. We all need this vision of the altar. We need to see that, no matter what our age may be, we all were terminated on the cross at the same time. The riches of God were released there, and all the negative things were terminated there. Therefore, the all-inclusive death of Christ on the cross was our termination and God's release.

Although we meet the cross everywhere in our Christian life, we experience the cross in a particular way when we come to the altar at the center of God's building. To come to the altar at the center is to realize that all that we are and all that we have were terminated at the cross. Here we have a definite experience of the cross and not merely a superficial knowledge about the cross. In our fellowship with the

Lord, we are brought to the point where we touch the cross in a definite way and sense that God will no longer allow us to live in our natural man. This causes us to have a major breakthrough and an absolute submission to the cross. As a result, we will know what the natural life is and what it means for the old creation to be stripped away. This is the experience of the cross as the center.

I am grieved that although many of us have heard messages about the cross, only a few among us truly live a crucified life. For example, we may not live a crucified life in our married life. If a married brother and his wife argue with each other, this indicates that they are not living a crucified life. If they were living a crucified life, they would not accuse each other and vindicate themselves. Those who live a crucified life do not vindicate themselves when they are attacked or criticized. They experience the termination of their Adamic life and of the old creation through the death of the cross and enjoy God's riches and His divine element, which were released through the cross.

When some, especially young people, hear this word about the altar, they may be frightened and think that it is better not to love the Lord and seek Him...They may fear that it would be dangerous to reach the altar and become a burnt offering.

We need to realize, however, that since the Lord has had mercy on us, we cannot escape Him. We were not saved of our own will. On the contrary, while we were wandering in the world, having no intention of entering in through the gate, the Lord brought us through the gate. Apart from our own choice, we believed into Christ. This is altogether a matter of God's selection, of His mercy, and of His reaching us with His care. The principle is the same in our loving the Lord and pursuing Him. If we did not believe in the Lord, love Him, and pursue Him, we would feel uncomfortable and dissatisfied. But the more we love the Lord and pursue Him, the more we are satisfied. This also is a matter of the Lord's mercy. Because of His mercy to us and His operation within us, we have no choice except to go forward; we cannot turn back. If we do not advance toward the altar but instead try to go back to the outer court, we will feel uncomfortable. Therefore, we need to go on and on until we reach the altar.

Eventually, all those who are spiritual and who pursue the Lord end up on the altar where they are terminated, even destroyed, by the Lord. Seemingly without reason, the Lord tears them down and strips them of everything. God puts to death all that we are and all that we have. Madame Guyon experienced this and could say that God gave her the cross. Because we love the Lord and pursue Him, sooner or later we will meet the cross, which will tear us down and bring everything into death. We will be forced to pass into death, even if we are not willing to do so.

We do not experience the cross once for all—we experience the cross again and again. Those who pursue the Lord will meet the cross at every turn. At one time they will meet the cross through their children. At another time they will meet the cross through their spouse or through illness. At other times, they may experience the cross through the church or through the co-workers. The reason that the cross is everywhere is that we must go through the cross in order to contact God. Thank the Lord that God gives us the cross and that the cross gives us God. The ones who love God the most and experience Him the most are the ones who have gone through the cross.

We need to be impressed with the fact that only by passing through the altar can we come to the temple. Whereas the altar signifies the cross, the temple signifies both Christ and the church, the Body of Christ. The cross, Christ, and the church are the central subject not only of the New Testament but also of the whole Bible. First we come to the altar, the cross, and then we come to the temple. This indicates that we cannot have the church apart from the cross. Through the experience of the cross, we are brought into the reality of the church. Only as we pass through the cross do we have the real church life. On the one hand, as saved ones we come together to practice the church life; on the other hand, we can have the reality of the church only after we have passed through the cross.

We all need to be brought to the point where we know and accept the cross. Then as we pass through the cross, our flesh, our old creation, our self, and our natural man with the natural life will all be dealt with. Everything that has its source in our humanity will be terminated at the cross. Then we will have the reality of the church. Then we will be one in the Lord, we will have genuine coordination, and we will have harmony, rest, and the presence of Christ. This is the temple, the place where God dwells. This is the expression of Christ, the reality of the church. (*Life-study of Ezekiel*, pp. 236-241, 246-247)