

“An Open Letter”

Dear brothers and sisters,

“The time of the Lord's return is at hand. For this reason we are reevaluating many matters in the light of the judgment seat.”

The above quote is from “An Open Letter” in Issue No. 1 of *The Present Testimony* by Brother Watchman Nee published in January of 1928. Today, ninety-two years later, we are even closer to the time of the Lord's return. Today, seeing all the things happening around us, we feel even more deeply that the time of the Lord's return is closer than any of the previous ages. The instability of the world situation, the global spread of the pandemic, the panic in people's hearts, the uncontrollable environment, and the economic crisis all indicate that this age is nearing a fundamental turning point. At this solemn moment, it should be a time for us to have a reevaluation. To reevaluate means that what was formerly the standard can no longer be the standard for today; what's considered acceptable living can no longer be our living today; the former goals in our lives can no longer be our goals today; our former mode of valuation can no longer be the mode of valuation today; and our former ways can no longer be our ways today. Everything needs to be reevaluated in the light of the judgment seat. This means that everything needs to be reevaluated according to the Lord's return and the consummation of the age. Our former church life, former services, and former ways of living all need to be reconsidered and reevaluated.

First we need to reevaluate our living. The Lord said, “Do not be anxious for tomorrow,” but “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness” (Matt. 6:33, 34). Do we trust in God in everything to live the life of the tent on the earth, having a living that is uprooted from the earth and storing up our treasures in heaven? Or are we still anxious for tomorrow? The young people are anxious for their employment after graduation, as well as their marriage and family. The middle-aged people are anxious for their career and their business performance for the next quarter or next year. The elderly people are anxious for their health, savings, and relationship with their children and grandchildren. We need to reevaluate. The apostles called people to be delivered from sins and turn to the Lord, but the Lord called people to be delivered from mammon to follow Him (Matt. 6:24). Many preach the gospel of prosperity, but the Lord preached the gospel of poverty. The age is coming to an end, and one of the signs of the Lord's coming is that people are storing up treasures (James 5:3). The ten virgins are “going out of the world” to meet the bridegroom (Matt. 25:1, note 5). The harvest needs to be “dried of all the earthly water” (Rev. 14:15, note 2) to be ripe for reaping. Brother Lee, in his diary right before the great revival in Chefoo, wrote on December 23 of 1942: “We should not be concerned with what we will eat, what we will drink, or what we will be clothed with; this is what the worldly people seek. We should care only for God's kingdom and His righteousness. The worldly people lack clothing and food because they care only for their own living and not for God's kingdom and His righteousness” (*CWWL* Vol. 2, p. 28). A day earlier, he wrote: “How desolate is the situation on earth today! Even more desolate is the condition within man! How many hearts and souls have suffered to the extreme? How many souls

are perishing every day? The church has lost her function...The church is like this because her consecration in the past was not thorough” (p. 27). On December 26, he wrote: “The reason we are quiet, have no aspiration to spread the Lord’s kingdom, have no power and courage to spread the Lord’s gospel, have no living faith, and are timid is all because we have not had a thorough consecration, have not stopped living for ourselves, and have not lived entirely for the Lord!...If we live entirely for the Lord like Peter on the day of Pentecost, we will also be able to say as Peter said, ‘In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene rise up and walk’ (Acts 3:6b). But to say this, we must also be able to say, ‘Silver and gold I do not possess’ (v. 6)!” (p. 29)

We need to reevaluate: does our living today have dispensational value? Do we, our person, have a dispensational significance before the Lord?

In order to have this kind of living, we need to be filled with the Spirit inwardly and outwardly every day (see *The Way to Practice the Lord’s Present Move*, ch. 2). If a balloon is not filled with air, it cannot ascend. Why do we need to have much and thorough prayer? It is for us to be filled both inwardly and outwardly. Why do we need to confess our sins and repent? It is because they are the requirements for us to be filled with the Spirit. Without a living that is daily filled with the Spirit both inwardly and outwardly, we cannot have a living that has dispensational value. In order for the virgins to meet the bridegroom, the requirement is that their vessels be filled with oil (Matt. 25:4). In order for us to redeem the time, we must be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:16, 18).

During these days, the more difficult the outward environment is, the stronger we feel inwardly that now is the time for God’s children to be uprooted from the world and to live the life of the tent. The benefit of migration is to cut off our old background and to learn to simply look to God to live a life of faith. The spreading of the kingdom is inextricably linked to being cut off from the world. The persecution in Acts 8 suddenly uprooted all the disciples and scattered them everywhere, which put the Lord’s command in chapter 1 into action. In order for the gospel of the kingdom to be preached to the whole inhabited earth, there is the need for some to live the kingdom life. For the Lord’s return to become real, man must “go out of the world” as the virgins did in Matthew 25. One hundred fifty years ago the gospel of grace was preached to China. One reason for that was that some in that age saw that the Lord might return in that generation and that the gospel needed to be preached to the whole world in that generation. Today, the gospel of the kingdom needs to be preached to the whole inhabited earth because the time of the Lord’s return is even closer. At this juncture, should we not reevaluate how we should spend our remaining days on the earth? Should we not cut off the old ties at this time to practically live the life of the tent, live for the gospel, and move for the Lord?

At this moment, we also need to reevaluate our church life. Whether the Lord is satisfied with our church life is one thing, we should first ask ourselves whether we are satisfied with our current church life. True, we have very good truths, and we also have a church life that we have been comfortable with for many years. However, what we need to reevaluate is whether or not this

kind of church life can satisfy the Lord's need, whether it can usher in the Lord's return. In the church where we are, has the number of saints grown? Are the saints vital? In 1992 and 1993, Brother Lee was deeply dissatisfied with the church life at that time, so he released the messages on the vital groups, hoping to produce the overcomers outside of the infrastructure of the church life at that time, who would be delivered from the three great enemies of death, lukewarmness, and barrenness. Unfortunately, although the messages were released, the practice has yet to be seen. In the past twenty-three years, although the church life in each locality has gone on steadily, they are still mainly composed of meetings and mainly carried out by way of asking people to come to the meetings, and what is treasured among us is still the great number of attendance. Please consider: in the light of the Lord's return, shouldn't this kind of church life be reevaluated?

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the brothers and sisters have been limited physically. All physical meetings have stopped, and the saints can only communicate mostly over the internet in smaller settings. But in this process, many found out that brothers and sisters actually prefer this new mode of church life. Over the internet, everyone prays for one another, has mutual fellowship, and cares for the new ones. Everyone is able to function, and everyone practices begetting, nourishing, perfecting, and building in an organic way. This is actually the vital groups that Brother Lee talked about, which is for everyone to function and for everyone to serve as a priest. In this way, many new ones have been saved, and many who have not been meeting have been reconnected. In many localities, the number of people has increased, and many members of the Body have been enlivened. It turns out that this is the way for the Body of Christ to be built up. Of course, we are not saying that we should not resume the physical meetings after the pandemic. However, in light of this new situation brought in by the pandemic, isn't it worthwhile for us to reevaluate our church life? Shouldn't we turn more from "meeting" to "people," from "coming" to "going," and from "big" to "small"?

In the light of the Lord's return, we should also reevaluate our service. The ultimate goal of our service is to perfect people. The work of the ministry is to perfect the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ. Today our work is not to raise up a work but to raise up people. The effectiveness of our work today is not measured by how much work is done but how many people have been raised up. Strictly speaking, our work today is not to do the work but to distribute the work. Today the question is not how much we ourselves have done but how much others have done. The parable of the slaves in Matthew 25 reminds us that the question is not how much we have maintained but how much we have reproduced. The five-talented one perfected another five-talents, and the two-talented one perfected another two-talents. Thus, they received the Lord's approval. But the one-talented one did not perfect anyone, and he was cast into the darkness. The Lord is coming to settle an account with each one of us. Today in the light of the Lord's return, we all need to reevaluate our service and see whether our service, in the light of the judgment seat, will be approved or not. The good and faithful slaves were not those who merely maintain their portions but those who reproduced themselves. The evil and slothful slave was not one who abandoned his service but one who did not reproduce himself. Whether in

the church or in the vital groups, our duty is to perfect others unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ. We need to use all wisdom to perfect others. We need to use all those whom people regard as useless. We need to dig out all the one-talented ones from the earth, so that their talents are no longer buried in the world. The growth in life is gradual, but the trading of one's talent is immediate (Matt. 25:16). In the light of the Lord's return, we need to evaluate our service to see whether it is up to the Lord's standard.

Lastly, in the light of the Lord's return, we need to reevaluate our work. There are two basic questions: whether our work is of a maintenance nature or of a pioneering nature, and whether our work is static or dynamic. The pattern of the brothers who went before us is that they were always moving and progressing. At the outset of the Sino-Japanese War, Brother Nee founded the magazine called *The Open Door*. He reminded the co-workers that they should not merely try to cope with the environment; instead, they should preach the gospel everywhere to spread the Lord's testimony. The co-workers should not stay in one place but should travel everywhere. Actually, the testimonies today in many places throughout Southeast Asia were all started at that time. The Lord's testimony has been on the island of Taiwan for over seventy years. From the beginning Brother Lee's hope was that Taiwan would be a starting point where the Lord's testimony would spread to the whole world. Today in this special time, should we not reevaluate the direction of our work? Actually, just in Taiwan alone, there are still quite a few cities and towns that do not have a church and require propagation there. The needs outside Taiwan are even greater. Now is not the time for us to stick to our own place. Now is the time for us to spread the gospel of the kingdom with a view of the whole earth. Should we allow ourselves to be stuck in one place till the Lord comes? If Abraham had not left his own land and his own country, God's move on earth could not have begun. What the Bible gave us is not the biographies of the apostles but the *acts* of the apostles. Recently after the three rounds of 24-hour prayer and the 30-day global prayer, a brother in China saw lightning and heard voices of thunders in his prayer and immediately consecrated himself and migrated with his factory to a place in Southeast Asia where there is not yet a church. Is this a precursor of the Lord's move?

May the Lord cause us to see the opportunity afforded to us today to cooperate with His move. At a time when the whole world is facing an unprecedented challenge, may we reevaluate our living, meetings, service, and work in the light of the Lord's return.

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May 29, 2020