

WHAT GOD HAS ENTRUSTED TO HIS CHURCH

TRUSTWORTHINESS

II Timothy 1:8-14—Be not therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner; but suffer evil along with the glad tidings, according to the power of God; who has saved us, and has called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages of time, but has been made manifest now by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who has annulled death, and brought to light life and incorruptibility by the glad tidings; to which I have been appointed a herald and apostle and teacher of the nations. For which cause also I suffer these things; but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep for that day the deposit I have entrusted to him. Have an outline of sound words, which words thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Keep, by the Holy Spirit which dwells in us, the good deposit entrusted.

Acts 2:42—And they persevered in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, in breaking of bread and prayers.

Revelation 3:12-13—He that overcomes, him will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more at all out; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven, from my God, and my new name. He that has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

May we have a word of prayer:

Dear Lord, as we gather together this morning our hearts are full of gratitude. Thou are so good and gracious to us. It is Thou who has begun this conference and we do believe Thou are the one to end this conference. We do pray that during this last session of ministry whatever is yet unfinished will be finished by Thy Spirit. We pray that Thy Spirit would guide Thy word to each and every one of us according to Thy wisdom that Thy will may be accomplished to all of us. And we desire to give Thee all the glory. We ask in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

We are really thankful to our God because we believe He has begun this conference, and we also believe that He will end this conference. I feel deeply in my heart that it pleases Him to end this conference with the Lord's Table because the Lord's Table really acts out all that we have fellowshiped with on the theme: *What God Has Entrusted to the Church*. This is all being represented by the table. Here we find that our Lord Jesus shed His blood for us. Here we see how He gave His body to us. In other words, He gave Himself as His all to His church. He has not withheld anything from us. He poured out Himself completely to us that we may have fellowship with Him, that we may have life and life abundant. And it is only on the basis of that life of Christ that we may be able to bear that witness. We are here to exhibit the death of our Lord. We are here to present not

only to the seen world but even to the unseen world what Christ means to us. We are here to declare the victory of Christ, and we are here to wait for His return when His glory shall fill the earth as water fills the sea. This is our testimony. This is where the power of bearing the testimony comes from. It is not by ourselves; it is by Him who gave Himself to us. So I do feel that this is the right way to end and also to begin the days ahead.

THE TESTIMONY

What God has entrusted to the church is not a small thing. This is not something that we can neglect. This is something that every redeemed person of the Lord must know, and not only know but also to enter into it. What God has entrusted to the church is none other than the testimony of Jesus. He wants us to see Christ as He sees Him. Christ is the first and the last. In other words, He is everything. This is not a theory; this is truth. This is an experience. It is the will of God that we who are saved will see Jesus as the first and the last of our lives. This is our testimony to the world, and we are here to testify that He is the living One because He lives in us. His life is an overcoming life. His life is a life of love. This is the testimony that we all bear. Thank God that our Lord Jesus died for our sakes. He went into death in order to rob death of its power because He is the resurrection and the life. And He wants us to know the power of His resurrection in our daily walk that we may exhibit it. And He lives forever more. He lives in us to show forth His everlasting life. He holds in His hand the keys of death and of Hades. Believers may go to sleep but we never die because God has already taken away the power of death in Christ. The Lord Jesus said, "I will build My church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." This is the testimony of the church. This is what God has entrusted to us. Isn't it amazing that God should entrust us with His beloved Son?

He has entrusted to us the glad tidings. This is a tiding of life overcoming death. It tells us of our Lord Jesus as the living One who lives forevermore, and because He lives we also live.

Then we find that what God has entrusted to us can also be called *the* faith. All the counsel of God recorded in the word is entrusted to us. We are not supposed to know only the beginning of the gospel. We need to know the wisdom of God in a mystery, what He has purposed for us in Christ Jesus even before the foundation of the world, and this is the trust that God has entrusted the church.

THE CHURCH

Then we have also fellowshiped on this matter of the church. Oftentimes we find that we are very individualistic. It is true that we are individuals, and it is not God's will that we should imitate other people. God wants us to imitate Christ only. God loves variety. Everyone is different. But in spite of all our differences He unites us as one in Christ Jesus. Our Lord Jesus is the fullness of the Godhead, whatever you can think of God. How can we comprehend the riches of God? We cannot understand His love, His holiness, His righteousness, His glory, His almightiness, and His wisdom. We cannot fathom it, and yet our Lord Jesus is the fullness of the Godhead. And this fullness is to fill the body. No one person can contain all the riches of Christ. No one person can manifest the glory of Christ. It needs a body, a group of people. We say it is a new creation, a new mankind, and those who are redeemed of the Lord become members of the body of Christ. Then to that body the testimony of Jesus is entrusted. So we have already

fellowshipped on the importance of vision, of seeing what the church is because this is the will of God. This is the only vessel that can contain that treasure; not only to contain the treasure but also to manifest, to express the light of that treasure.

The church is a lampstand made of gold. In the Old Testament, when God commanded Moses to build the tabernacle, there were only two pieces of furniture that were of pure gold—nothing but gold. One is the mercy seat in the holiest of all, and we know that our Lord Jesus is the mercy seat. Then there was another piece of furniture that was of gold, and it is the lampstand. We would think that the church is composed of all of us, and so far as we are concerned we are wood. Yet we find in that lampstand there was only gold.

What is the church? We say the church is the gathering together of the saved ones, and probably we think that is the right definition. But when all the saved ones are gathered together, we think it is Paradise. Yet we find it is like hell because even though we are saved, even though we have Christ in us, our old nature, our old self is so strong. Oftentimes we think that our brother or sister is rather strong, not knowing that we are just as strong. And how when we are together we clash with one another! That is the reason we become church goers. On Sunday morning, for an hour we meet together and there are people entertaining us. After that hour we depart. The less contact we have the better we are. We are not one body. We are not sticking to one another. We are afraid of being too close to one another. Even though we are saved, even though we have the life of Christ in us, our Adamic life, our old life, our self is strong. There is more wood than gold, and this wood is corrupted wood.

It is true that the word *ecclesia* means “called-out ones gathered together.” But do not forget Jesus said, “When two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.” In other words, when the two or three are gathered together, that is not the church. Two or three can gather together as a social thing, but they have to gather together in the name of the Lord Jesus. In the name of the Lord Jesus means under His headship. When we gather together and hold fast the Head, then you find the reality of the church.

THE CHURCH IS ALL OF GOLD

What is the church? Once I was sharing with brother Sparks. I knew that our dear brother was very fearful of anything that sounded like a formula because he believed that spirituality has no formula. But on that day I thought that in order to help the brothers and sisters I had to use a formula. So I asked his forgiveness first, and then I suggested this question: “What is the church?” Suppose in this world we have only three Christians—Peter, James, and John. You could not have better Christians than these three. So what is the church? Is it Peter plus John plus James equals the church? If that is the case, what do you do with Peter who wanted to be the first? He was always the one who led. Then one day the two sons of Zebedee out maneuvered him. When our Lord was going to Jerusalem, they came with their mother who was our Lord’s earthly aunt, and they asked the Lord: “Promise You will give whatever we ask You.” I think they were ashamed of what they were going to ask. “Here is a check; you just sign it.” And our Lord was very wise. He said, “What do you want?” Their mother said, “In Your kingdom let my two sons sit, one on Your right and one on Your left.” They got it all. No wonder the other disciples got indignant. Is that the church? There was a power struggle in the church. That is something that should never happen. No, this is not the church.

So what is the church? The Christ in Peter plus the Christ in John plus the Christ in James equals the church. Now, that may be your definition. But then you find in the church there is not only Christ but also Peter and John and James. Now as long as they are the elements of the church there will be problems. So what is the church? The Christ in Peter minus Peter, plus the Christ in John minus John, plus the Christ in James minus James equals the church. This means that the church is all gold. There is not any wood in it.

What is the church for? The church is not for itself; it is a lampstand. The church is to contain and to uplift the light. Our Lord Jesus Himself is the light, and the church is the lifting up of the light. The church does not speak of itself; the church speaks of Christ. And the testimony of Jesus is entrusted to the church. No individual can bear that testimony. We need the whole body to uplift the Head.

Now we would like to conclude with another thing, and that is trustworthiness. The trust is Christ, the testimony of Jesus. The trustee is the church, the body of Christ. Is the church trustworthy? Thank God, Christ has committed Himself totally to the church. It is as if He is willing to rise or fall together with the church. He commits His own destiny to the church, whether the church will uplift Him or will put Him down. This is a matter of trustworthiness.

CALLED TO DISCIPLESHIP

We have already mentioned before that our Lord Jesus came into this world not only to save the lost but to call with a holy calling, and this call is according to the eternal purpose of God. He calls us to be His body. This is the call of discipleship. The call of discipleship is none other but to be like Him, that we may be transformed and conformed to His image, that we may be gold instead of just wood. This is our calling.

When our Lord Jesus was in the world, He began to call His disciples. But we find even among His disciples whenever our Lord Jesus was trying to lift them out of earth into heaven, whenever our Lord Jesus tried to tell them of something spiritual rather than natural, even His disciples could not understand Him. Not only that, they thought it was too hard. This was too much for them, and many of His disciples departed from Him. They did not walk with Him anymore. This was not only true when our Lord was on earth, this is true even today. Our Lord Jesus turned to His twelve and said, "Do you also want to go?" The Lord gave them the liberty to leave. And you remember how Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we know that You are the Son of God." In other words, here was a person who was representing the others. He was caught by the vision of the Lord and once caught no escape. Even though he did not understand, yet he trusted.

Dear brothers and sisters, thank God He has called us to be His disciples. In spite of all our weaknesses, if we really see that He is the Son of God, that He has the words of life, even if He asks if we want to go, we will stay put with Him. This is something so important to us today. It is not because there are some people who are perfect or strong; we are all weak. But praise God, once we have a vision of Christ, once we see who He is, that He is not only our Savior but He is our Lord, He has caught us and we have no escape. Other people may have somewhere to go, but to whom shall we go? We are stuck with Him. This is what is necessary.

Even though you are weak, even though you are imperfect, are you caught by the Lord? Peter showed his weakness again and again afterwards, even denying the Lord sometimes. Can someone be weaker than that? But that is not a problem. The problem is: are you caught by the Lord? May the Lord really arrest each one of us. He has saved us, He has called us, He has caught us, and there is no escape in our lives. We may fail but He will raise us up. And to such people He commits Himself.

On the day of Pentecost, when the one hundred and twenty were gathered together in that upper room and prayed, these were the people caught by Christ. In the ascension of our Lord Jesus, at one time five hundred brethren saw Him, but only one hundred and twenty obeyed Him and stayed in Jerusalem. They waited for His promised Spirit. They prayed with one accord, and on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came, and in one Spirit they were baptized into one body. And to that body Christ the Head committed Himself.

Oh, brothers and sisters, when the early church began, from one hundred and twenty believers it became three thousand, one hundred and twenty. And all these members of the body persevered. They continued on together in the teaching of the apostles and the fellowship of the apostles, in the breaking of bread and in prayers. It was not only the one hundred and twenty but also the three thousand, and then four thousand were added. The body began to grow as the riches of the Head dwelt within it. And through that body there was the testimony of Jesus.

PEOPLE OF THE WAY

Today, we call ourselves Christians but the name Christian at that time was not there. It was not until Acts 11 in the church in Antioch that you find the name *Christian*. But even without a specific name, strangely you find that all those who believed in the Lord Jesus, all those Jews and Gentiles seemed to live a life altogether the same. The Jews have their Jewish way of life, and the Gentiles have their Gentile way of life, just like the Americans have their American way of life and the Chinese have their Chinese way of life. But here was a people composed of Jews and Gentiles, and they lived a different way of life, a different manner of life. It was not something taught. It seemed to be so supernaturally natural. How they lived together! How they loved one another! How they rose above their selfishness! They were willing to share with one another. How they fellowshiped with one another! How they kept the teaching of Christ together! They expressed their unity in the breaking of bread because there is only one loaf. And they fellowshiped one with another. They lived for Christ and Christ lived in them. When the world looked at them, they said, "Who are these people?" So in the beginning of the book of Acts you find they called these people the people of the way. In the Chinese, unfortunately, it is translated a little different because the word *dau* can be translated as "truth" or "way." But in the book of Acts when they are called *people of the way*, it refers to their walk. In other words, Christ is the way, and they walked following the Lamb.

The early church had a glorious testimony. Now it is true that in the early church they had problems, but problems to them were opportunities. They were not really problems because when a problem is solved in the right way, it is a blessing.

Within thirty some years, when you come to the end of the book of Acts, you find that Paul, for the sake of the testimony of Jesus, was in prison in Rome. But he was able to live in his hired house, and he received people. How he preached to them concerning

Christ and the kingdom! And he did it unhindered. Now that is the history of the early church, and it shows us that our Lord was right. He committed Himself to His body, and this body was trustworthy.

JOHN'S VISION

Unfortunately, after another thirty some years, when you come to the end of the first century, you find in the book of Revelation that John, for the sake of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus, was exiled to the island of Patmos. There he saw a vision. He saw seven golden lampstands with one like the Son of Man standing in the midst of them. These seven golden lampstands represent the church of all ages. Whether you look at it chronologically or contemporarily, at any time where you find these different situations, our Lord Jesus was there. What was He doing there? We said that He was there as the royal High Priest and He was ministering in the true tabernacle. What was He looking for? Strangely, you find at the beginning of each letter He said something about Himself. In chapter one there is a ten-fold description of the Son of Man, and then in each letter He gives something of what He is to the seven local churches. So even the revelation of Himself is partial. No one local church contains all the revelation of Christ. All the local churches join together to share the fullness of Christ, and each local church has a specific commitment. Every local church is different. The difference is because Christ has committed Himself in specific ways. That is why we need fellowship. We need to share with one another so that we can have the whole testimony.

So what is the Lord looking for in the church? He is looking for Himself. It is as if He said, "I have committed Myself to you. Can I find Myself in you? You may have many good things, but if I cannot find Myself in you, you have failed your responsibility." Among the seven churches, the church in Philadelphia is what the Lord really desires to have. But when you read about the other churches, aside from Smyrna where there was no blame, the Lord called all the other churches to repent. Why? The repentance was not because of certain sins they had committed. It is true they had committed sin, but the repentance is to return to Christ.

Brothers and sisters, you will say the church has failed, that God is wrong. How can He commit His beloved Son to the church? Men may fail but God never fails. Therefore you find the last message to the church is "repent." The message is, "He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He that overcomes..." In other words, God is calling for overcomers in the church. Who are these overcomers? The overcomers are not super Christians. The overcomers are not the perfect ones, sinless perfect. No, these overcomers are the normal Christians. What is the normalcy of a Christian? Christ has given Himself to him, and he lives according to Christ.

OVERCOMERS

Brothers and sisters, when the church seems to fail in general, they fail in the testimony of Jesus. Then the Lord calls overcomers out in the church to stand for His testimony. The call to overcomers is personal, but the effect of the overcomers is corporate. They are the first fruits, and the first fruits always guarantee the harvest. The overcomers do not overcome for themselves; the overcomers overcome for the church. The call is personal but the work is corporate. This is the way that God will accomplish

His purpose. Now the question is: who can overcome? What is the secret of the overcomers? Or you can broaden it and say, how can the church be trustworthy?

ONLY BY GRACE

You remember II Timothy 1:9: “Who has saved us, and has called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages of time.”

It is clear to us here that in order to be trustworthy it is not according to our works. It is just as when we are saved. We do not become righteous according to our works; it is by the grace of God. Likewise, in order to be trustworthy it is not by our works; it is by the grace which God has given to us in Christ Jesus. The question is: do we depend on ourselves or do we trust in His grace? Whenever God has a purpose, at the same time He provides grace accordingly. So when we are called with such a purpose to be the bearer of the testimony of Jesus, how can we fulfill it? It is not by our efforts; it is only by the grace of God. The grace is there. Whenever there is a purpose, there is grace. Whenever there is a call, there is grace. So those who become trustworthy are those who depend on the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

What is grace? Grace is something freely given. Grace is the gift of God. You do not work for it. It is not because you are worthy. It is because you look to His grace. If we depend on ourselves, we will fail. If we confess that we are weak but He is strong and we look to His grace, you will find His grace is sufficient for our needs.

How can we keep the deposit? We keep it in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. The faith here is not my faith; it is His faith. You remember Galatians 2:20: “I am crucified with Christ; no longer live I. It is Christ who lives in me, and now I live in the flesh.” How? “By the faith of the Son of God who loves me and gave Himself for me.” We do not have faith. Jesus is the Author and the Finisher of faith. We look to Him and He gives us faith. We look to Him and He completes that faith. It is the same thing with love. It is not like Peter who said, “Lord, I love You. I am willing to die with You.” But that love does not work. It is not the love of God. So when our Lord said, “Simon, Son of Jonah, do you love Me?” He dared not say it. He said, “I have good feeling about You.” But he dared not say, “I love You,” because he realized the love is in Christ Jesus, and this is grace. Whether it is faith or whether it is love, it is grace. It is open to all of us.

Then in v. 14: “Keep, by the Holy Spirit which dwells in us, the good deposit entrusted.” It is not by our flesh; it is by the Holy Spirit, and this is the Spirit of grace. So the only way to be trustworthy is not in ourselves. We cannot depend on ourselves. We confess we are weak; we need Him. We look to Him, and His grace is sufficient.

MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT

There is a story. There was a servant of God, Mr. Webb-Peploe, who loved the Lord. Once he took his child and went to the seashore for rest. Unfortunately, that child died; so he buried the child and then went home. It was Saturday and usually on Saturday he would prepare his message that he would speak to the people the next day. In his study he was searching, trying to find something to say. He was such a good man, and he wanted to comfort the congregation. No matter how he searched he could not find a text because he was sorrowful even unto death. How could he comfort his people if he himself was uncomforted? As he was struggling, he happened to look up, and he saw a Scripture verse

above the fireplace and it said, "My grace is sufficient for you." He said, "Lord, Your grace is not sufficient. I am sorrowful. I am not comforted." He struggled over this matter, and then he saw in that text the word: "My grace *is* sufficient for you." The *is* was in a different color, and that revealed something to him. He was praying that the grace of God may be sufficient to him, will be sufficient to him, but now the Lord said, "It *is* sufficient." Faith was given to him. He believed in the word of God, and he was comforted. The next morning when he went to deliver his sermon, he just told the people what happened to him, and the floor was filled with tears.

Brothers and sisters, do you experience the grace of God? It is hard to boast of our weakness, but His power is perfected in our weakness. We want to be strong. We think only if we are strong that we will glorify God. We can fulfill our responsibility. We can bear the testimony of Jesus. But on the contrary, the truth is when we confess that we are nothing, we cannot, we do not even try, but we look up to Him, the Author and Finisher of faith.

What is it that God has entrusted to us? It is the testimony of Jesus. What is the vessel, the trustee of that trust? It is the church, *the* Christ. Who makes us trustworthy? It is Christ Himself. From the beginning to the end it is Christ because this is the will of God. One day all things will be summed up in Christ. Wherever you look you will see Christ, and this must begin with us.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, we do worship Thee. Thou have not only saved us, Thou hast called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to Thy own purpose and grace in Christ Jesus. Dear Lord, we are touched by Thy love. We want to surrender ourselves completely to Thee. We want to thank Thee for that trust Thou hast given to us, and we want to thank Thee that Thou who has committed is the One who will keep it to that day. Like Thy servant, Paul, we know whom we have believed and we are fully persuaded that You are able to keep the deposit which we have entrusted to You until that day. Praise be unto God, in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.