

WCCC July 28, 2010

The Right Course to Finish: The Goal and the Way (1)

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Brothers and sisters if you attended WCCC last year, I think we still remember the theme: recovering the testimony of Jesus Christ. We had several brothers who clearly shared with us concerning this topic. From the conference we came to understand that the testimony of Jesus Christ is the greatest entrustment for His Church. All the churches on earth should be the testimony of Jesus and be for the testimony of Jesus. In Church history, many of God's children after they came to realize this testimony, they were just like their Lord. They were willing to pay the high cost, willing to suffer and many were martyred, all for this testimony. So in Revelation it speaks of the souls of those who were martyred because they were all for the testimony of Jesus. We know that nowadays on earth, the testimony of Jesus is the main purpose of the enemy. Wherever God's children are gathered together for God's testimony, the enemy's attack will be there too. We know how important is the testimony of Jesus. Our elderly brother has given us a clear reminder in his message. He mentioned that the testimony of Jesus Christ is Jesus Christ Himself. So the individual testimony that we have is not for ourselves, but for Christ. Of course we know that the Church does not have her own testimony, but the Church only testifies of the Lord. The Church is the vessel which testifies of Jesus. Our brother also mentioned that the testimony of Jesus is God's eternal purpose from eternity past to eternity to come. This is God's most important purpose that He has set. Through generations, God had revealed His purpose to many saints. When saints received this revelation and came to know the testimony of Jesus, they took the testimony of Jesus as the goal of their lives. Of course throughout Church history, many often failed concerning this testimony, but God has never given up. So throughout the generations, God is continually doing His work of recovery. We know that as we come to the end times, the testimony of Jesus is God's greatest recovery work in His Church. We thank the Lord that He has clearly released His heart's purpose among us last year. Through brother's fellowship together, we feel like we should take it one step further in this direction. The theme for the conference this year is about the way of the recovery of the testimony of Jesus. Not only do we know what the testimony of Jesus Christ is, but do we have a path to reach this goal? We look upon the mercy of the Lord. Throughout the conference this year, may the Lord clearly manifest His path among us. We have four brothers who will share on this topic. My responsibility is running the course. I have three messages, so I will fellowship on this topic in three aspects. The first message is concerning the Way and the Goal. We would like to see the relationship between the way and the goal. Lord willing, we will then talk about the person running the race. In the third aspect, we will talk about finishing the race. We want to look at how we are going to finish the course. Tonight we will fellowship concerning the first aspect: the Goal and the Way.

2 Timothy 4:7

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.

Acts 20:17-24

From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with

trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.

John 14:4-6

“And you know the way where I am going.” Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”

Psalms 84:5

How blessed is the man whose strength is in You, in whose heart are the highways to Zion!

The Ministry and the Goal

We all know that after Paul's third missionary journey, when he returned to Jerusalem, he came to Miletus. He gathered the elders from Ephesus at Miletus. He had a discourse with the elders. We've read his discourse and we feel that it was full of affection. There was a very important statement, where he talked about the relationship between his ministry and his goal. In verse 24 it says: *But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.* Paul is using his own personal experiences to express one thing, which is the close relationship between the goal and the ministry. This relationship is inseparable. Paul considered *finishing the course*, and in the original meaning *finishing the running of the way*. It is the equivalent to accomplishing the ministry that God had given to him. We know that when Paul met the Lord on his way to Damascus, God gave him a very important entrustment. In Acts 22 it talks about how God chose him so that he will understand the will of God, to see the Holy One and able to hear His voice. Through this, God told him that he must testify of this. So brothers and sisters, Paul had received a very important entrustment, but the accomplishment of this commission had a very close relationship to the course that he had to run. In the original Greek, this road can be translated as a course, or a race, or a career. The Apostle Paul came to know that to accomplish the entrustment received from the Lord meant that he had to finish running this course. He said that he had to testify of the gospel of the grace of God. We know that in Paul's heart, the gospel speaks of the Lord Jesus. So brothers and sisters, from the Apostle Paul we can see that for a person to finish his course, he is finishing the entrustment given to him by God. That entrustment is the goal that Paul had to reach on earth.

The Goal and the Course

Today we come to know that the goal and the course are the same thing. Certainly the course that Paul received here was what God had assigned him to run on the earth. Paul also used this to say that for every Christian who believes in the Lord, there is a course set for us that we have to run. We are to accomplish the entrustment that we have received from the Lord and to testify for the Lord. Each one of us has to finish our own course. After Paul received this revelation, Paul

regarded this more important than his own life. It reminds us that we need to regard the testimony of Jesus, the entrustment from the Lord and the course we need to finish as the most important thing in our life. We know that the course and the goal are inseparable. God has clearly revealed His heart regarding this throughout the entire Bible.

The Way to the Purpose

We know that before creation, God in His perfect wisdom had already set His unchangeable purpose. Not only has He set this purpose, He also set the way to reach this purpose. In the Old Testament, Psalm 84:5 is the most representative in saying that there is a *highway towards Zion*. We know that Zion represents God's eternal purpose and here there is a way that can reach this purpose. Brothers and sisters, not only has God in the Old Testament time revealed His purpose, but in the New Testament the meaning has been even more clearly demonstrated. We know that God's purpose is Christ and the way to God's purpose is also Christ.

As we read Ephesians and Colossians, we see that God has set a glorious purpose in this universe. In John 14, it says that Jesus is the way. We know that God's purpose and way had been set by His perfect wisdom and can never be changed. So as we follow the Lord, we need to be warned. Man cannot set a purpose for God and man cannot set a way for God's purpose. Because God has already set a way according to *His* purpose. Today if we do not walk in the way of the Lord, we can never reach the purpose God has given to us. I say again, Christ's testimony is the purpose of God. This purpose is our goal to run in on earth. This purpose has to be fulfilled by God and the direction in which we run.

Brothers and sisters, not only do we have to understand the purpose of God, but we have to know the way to reach this purpose. In our Christian experience and service, the way is a very important matter. Because the Lord not only highly values His purpose, He also values the way to reach that purpose. When Jesus said, "*I am the way, the truth and the life,*" we know that these three things are very important. Often times many Christians do not pay attention to the order. When the Lord mentioned these three things, the first thing He mentioned was the way. The Lord says that, "*No one goes to the Father except through Me.*" The Lord tells us how important is His way. Hebrews 10:19-20 tells us that *through the breaking of His body, He has inaugurated a new and living way for us, so that we can enter into the holy of holies with boldness*. All these sayings indicate the importance of the way.

The Way Comes First

In my understanding, the way, the truth and the life are important, but not only this, but the sequential order is very important. Or we can say it like this: you must have the correct way, then the truth can be clearly conveyed. Only the truth can produce the fruit of life. Only the manifestation of life can bring in the true testimony. To put it in another way, if your way is not correct, the truth cannot be clearly delivered. If what is delivered is not truth, then that will not have any fruit of life. If there is no fruit of life, then there is no testimony. So this way is also called the way of life. The testimony of Jesus is not a doctrine or saying, rather is the reality of Jesus' life being lived out from within us. According to God's Word, the first thing we need to emphasize upon is the way. We have to walk in the way set by the Lord. Then only in this way the truth will be meaningful to us. If we enter into the reality of the truth then we can have the manifestation of life. Then the testimony of Jesus is manifested through this life.

One Way to Reaching His Purpose

Of course today according to the world, this way is small and narrow. The Lord Jesus tells us clearly in Matthew 7, *the way to destruction is wide, but the gate to eternal life is small and the path is narrow*. In this world, there is no other way besides Him. When we preach the Gospel, we tell others just like Peter that besides Him there is no other salvation. In this world, there is no philosophy, no doctrine, no teaching that can save us. God's salvation for us is only through one way. Concerning this, all Christians can agree and insist upon it. We have no questions concerning this matter. But brothers and sisters we must know that regarding reaching the purpose of God, there is only one way. Very regrettably regarding this aspect, not all Christians can agree or insist on it. If we can all agree and insist on this, then there wouldn't be the current condition we see in Christianity, and the Church would not be filled with the methods and messages of man. When we preach the Gospel there is no other salvation apart from Him. If you do not take this way, you cannot be saved. However, concerning reaching the purpose of God, He gives us the same principle. If we are not walking on the way that God has set for us, then we cannot reach the purpose of God.

God's Way: Warning from the Story of Abraham

In the Old Testament, there is a recording concerning the mistake of faith that Abraham made. The reason why God recorded this event serves as a warning for us. God promised Abraham that he was to have a son, but God prolonged the time. Abraham became old and was almost 100 years old. His wife's child-bearing years also passed. It was a hopeless situation from both man's perspective and due to the circumstances. As we look back, we can see clearly that it was a test from God's hands. We know that we all have our weaknesses and as we come into this hopeless situation, we always try to find our own way out. We always try to find a way to help ourselves. In Genesis 21, God spoke very clearly to Abraham, that through Isaac your descendants shall be named. Isaac was the promised one, yet in chapter 16 when this old couple faced such a difficult situation, the Bible recorded that Abram listened to Sarai. He took Hagar and as a result Ishmael was born. In God's eyes, Ishmael was a replacement and was artificial. This was entirely not of God's purpose and God could not accept it. God can only accept what He has set in His purpose. So brothers and sisters, this is a very familiar story to all saints. But can we hear God's deep warning and deeper meaning behind the story? It tells us that if we are not in the way of the Lord, we can never reach the purpose of God. Maybe today we are in a very trying and severe condition, but no matter what, we have to believe God's promise. We can never, despite the hardship or difficult circumstances with seemingly no way out, try to find our own way out. If we do things in this way, then we will depart from the way of God. We need to know our God. He will never allow man to use anything else to replace His own decision.

God's Way: Individuals and the Church

We thank our Lord that through Church history, from the first century there were some people who truly knew God. They insisted upon the way set by God and suffered much. But no matter what, they never gave up. These were the witnesses of Jesus. If we walk in the wrong way and not in the way set by God, we can never reach the purpose God wants us to reach. If we cannot insist on keeping the way that God has given us, then as we talk about the testimony of Jesus, it will only be a doctrine. Brothers and sisters, not only is this true for our individual life, but as we see Church history, there are too many examples that tell us that if the way of the Church deviates upon the wrong way, the testimony of Jesus is lost. We just look at the history of the first century, the testimony at the beginning was so strong. But before the end of the first century,

we can already see from the epistles that there was a great deviation from walking upon the Lord's way. The testimony of many churches became weaker and weaker. When the Apostle John wrote Revelation, the majority of the seven churches had fallen into a very weak condition. Brothers and sisters, we know how God highly values the testimony of Jesus, and today we need to run the right way.

How to Run: Know the Goal

So we have to ask, how can we run in the right way? Through the experiences of the apostles we can see that there are some important principles that we need to keep before the Lord. The first important principle is that we need to define our way according to that purpose. That is to say, we have to have a clear understanding of the purpose of God. We want to use the purpose of God as the goal for our pursuit, this goal will determine our course. We have mentioned several times that the purpose of God is the testimony of Jesus. This is the most important entrustment of God to His Church. The purpose of God building the Church on earth is for the testimony of His Son. The Church cannot be used for any other purpose. God built the Church for only one purpose, for the testimony of Jesus. This is the set purpose for us as we live church life. We need to use the path that can reach our goal as our path. Today whether we are running on the correct path or not, we need to measure it according to the goal. We need to have this desire that we will never run the way that cannot reach the goal. The one thing that Paul was most afraid of was running in vain. We use a lot of strength, much effort and run with much diligence, but if that way cannot reach the purpose of God, then even if you have run an entire lifetime, our running is in vain. So first of all, we need to be clear about the purpose, then we will have a clear goal. Brothers and sisters, we have to use this goal to set our course.

One Way, Many Paths

As we read the Bible, we all agree that God's way is only one and this way is the Lord Jesus Christ. Even though everyone understands this statement, yet the ways of the Church is very confusing. Some say that when we come to the book of Revelation, there is only one road in the New Jerusalem. We say that thank the Lord, while we may get lost on earth, but once in heaven we will never get lost. In the New Jerusalem there is only one road, no way to get lost. Yes, God's way is only one. Yet in this saying, we see much confusion among God's children, because in the Bible, there are two terms used describing this way. One is the 'way', the other is the 'course' or 'path'. There are some differences between these two terms. It is true that there is only one way to reach God's purpose. Yet in this way the path that God has set for us to run may be different. If we cannot make a clear distinction between these two things, we may make a great mistake. Just like how we have truth in the Bible, the objective truth is only one, however there are many different subjective experiences. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, "*Now there are distinctions of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are distinctions of services, and the same Lord; and there are distinctions of operations, but the same God who operates all things in all.*" [Darby translation] It says that there is only one Holy Spirit, but many spiritual gifts. There is one Lord, but there are many ministries. There is only one God, but many different functions. Indeed, there is only one way for God. Yet, the path that God has set for us may be many and different. Allow me to use one example to illustrate this.

In the Old Testament, God had a commandment for His people. Three times a year they had to go to Jerusalem to meet God. Jerusalem was a common goal for the people of Israel, but the twelve tribes were scattered around the land of Canaan. They were located from all directions, so

every year as they came to the festivals, they had to come to Jerusalem from all directions. Their goal was Jerusalem, yet their paths may have been different. As they came to Jerusalem, they would come to twelve gates around the city. With the exception of the east gate which remained closed, they could enter into the city through the other eleven gates. We can see that the goal was set by God, but the individual paths may be different. We see in Church history and even today that we often use our own personal and corporate experiences to judge others. Often we think that we are walking the right way, and only our group is walking in the right way. All people must come to our gathering, and then you are walking in the right way. There is only one way for God and indeed, God's way is only one referring to our Lord, but there are different paths.

The Goal Will Set the Path

Now we need to ask, which is the right path? First of all, we need to be clear about the goal. Today if you are running in the path which is able to reach the goal, then that is the right path. But we cannot do this to the extreme and say that all paths are correct. In reality, while only a few groups would actually say that only their paths are correct, everyone actually thinks that their own path is the right way. If not so, then we would not insist on our own ways. We always try to get people into our groups because we think that our way is the right way. Seldom we hear people say that they went the wrong way. Everyone runs their own way and thinks their way is right. But in reality, not all paths are right. We need God's purpose, His goal to determine the path. We never make the claim that we or our paths are right. We have to see whether or not we are able to reach the goal God wants us to reach. This is the easiest way that I can understand from the Bible. Each one of us and each gathering needs to pray before the Lord. As we walk in this path, can we reach God's purpose? Are we using the testimony of Jesus as our goal? Dear brothers and sisters, as we run the way of God, we have to know what is the right way. These are some simple principles. We pray that the Lord will give us clearer revelations from His Words. Our lifespan is very short, so may the Lord keep us from running in the wrong path. This not only concerns the testimony of Jesus, but concerns whether or not we can receive grace from the Lord. I believe all who are attending this conference love the Lord and have the desire to know His purpose. We have to pay great attention to the relationship between the goal and the way. Brothers and sisters, only when we run in the right way of God then our lives will not be spent in vain and there will be a true meaning to our gathering.

In the Bible, concerning God's way or concerning the path God wants us to run, we can see there are very important reminders from the saints in the Old Testament time or in the New Testament time. There are some characteristics to this path that we need to pay attention to. If we neglect these, we may run in the wrong path. I would like to mention these briefly.

Path of Righteousness

In Psalm 23:3, it says that this is a *path of righteousness*. In Proverbs 4 it is a *path of the righteous*. This reminds us that if you are running in the right way, this is a path that the unrighteous cannot run in. That means if you have sin and have not dealt with your sin, you cannot run in this way. We cannot carry our sin to run in this path. God has grace so that we can deal with our sin. We need our Lord to cleanse us with His blood. We must deal with sin if we have offended God or man, because this is the path for the righteous. It says that, "*the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day.*" If you are running on the righteous path, there is a characteristic of that path where it becomes brighter and

brighter. If the path you are running is becoming darker and darker, then you may be on the wrong path. May the Lord enlighten us. We cannot run this way with sin.

The Straight Path

In 2 Peter 2:15 it says, “*Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness.*” The “right way” here in the original means the “*straight way.*” God’s way is a straight way. God’s purpose is a straight line. God has never changed His purpose, so His way is never crooked. I very much like the hymn we sang in the beginning. There is a verse that says that the way to God has to be straight. This is a determination of a person who truly wants to walk in the way of the Lord. Only the flesh likes to walk a crooked way. Balaam was a prophet and did not walk in the straight way because of his greed. He wanted unrighteous wealth and so he deviated from the path. He even set an example for the crooked way so the Bible even has a term called “*the way of Balaam.*” Brothers and sisters, this is a warning for us for the wrong path. Anytime when we live in the natural, corrupt flesh then we are in the crooked path. We know that in this generation to walk in this straight path, you will encounter many difficulties. Not only will you have opposition from the world, opposition from the enemy, even brothers and sisters around you may be opposed to you. Walking in the straight path is costly, but you have to walk in the straight way because God’s way is a straight way. This is a very important test for us. No wonder when Jesus came into this world, God sent John the Baptist to be the forerunner for Jesus. In John 1:23 it tells of what the purpose is for John the Baptist to come into the world. The one thing he did was to *make straight the path for the Lord.* Brothers and sisters, today as we are testifying for our Lord, if we are on the crooked path, we cannot testify for our Lord. In ourselves and in the church, if we want to make the way straight, we must have the spirit of Elijah and John the Baptist. Today we see the crooked paths are everywhere. Oftentimes when we have a desire to make the Lord’s way straight, because of great difficulties we often give up. We see many dear brothers and sisters had a very strong desire when they were young, but as the years pass by, they didn’t make the paths of the church straight, but rather the way of the world made them crooked. This is saddening. If this is the right path of God, it has to be a straight path.

The Highway

In Psalm 84:5 it says that *the way to Zion is a highway.* Indeed from the perspective of the world this is a narrow way, but for us who are saved by grace we know that there is unlimited abundance. Indeed it is a highway to Zion. Why is this called a highway to Zion? Because this is a way prepared for all people. All who have been saved by grace can run in this way. As long as you have the desire, you can meet God in this way. Then we can know that the way to Christ for us is unlimited. All the experiences in the Lord are unlimited. It is impossible to exhaust all the experiences in this way. This means that not one person can experience all the experiences of Christ in this path. In Church history, there are many brothers and sisters who are rich in Christ, yet they only received that abundance according to their measure. No one can say that I have received all the abundance of Christ. We thank the Lord, even Paul who was so rich in Christ had to say that according to what I have, I still have not obtained it. In his riches, he still had to forget what was behind and press on forward. The Lord is so rich! In all the past writings of the saints in past generations, we can see that the abundance of Christ is unlimited. We thank our Lord; we do not have to admire others. As long as we finish the path that God has set for us, it is enough. The Lord didn’t ask us to understand all. Thank the Lord; this is the highway to Zion. Paul,

David and Moses could run this way, John and Peter can run this way, and you and I can also run in this way. We ask the Lord will give us a clear seeing inside of us so that we would have a deeper longing.

The Ancient Path

In Jeremiah 6:16 this is also called *the ancient path*. It is also referred to as the path of David. We can understand that this is God's purpose from before creation. We have been told by brothers that the revelation we have received nowadays is God's original purpose. The meaning of this ancient path is a reminder that we need to run in God's original purpose. How can we run in God's original purpose? We need to be governed by God's purpose. Like what other brothers have mentioned, we need to be governed by vision. Today as we run in God's way, we need to have a seeing inside of us. We are attracted by God's glorious purpose. All matters are governed by God's glory. As Jeremiah was encouraging the saints during the times of chaos, the Israelites had been in great confusion during the early stages of their captivity. The path was not clear. While many of God's children were not sure what to do, God's prophet came to encourage them. The Lord Jehovah said, "*Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths.*" This is an important reminder for us today. If we are not clear about our path, do not run aimlessly. First thing you need to do is to stand still. Do not be impulsive and calm down. Then you need to see and ask. You can seek fellowship; ask where God's original purpose is, without any fear of outward circumstances. If we are willing to live according to God's original purpose, then what is the result? "*You will find rest for your souls.*" Brothers and sisters, this is such a great reminder for us who are running after the Lord.

Run in the Right Way and Finish His Entrustment

We see concerning the right way set by God in the Bible, through the experiences of the saints, there are many different characteristics. We can come to understand these characteristics so it can be a great help to us as we run in this way. In this generation, we see that God still entrusts the testimony of Jesus to us who have been saved by grace. We need to reach the goal of God, and so we must first pay great emphasis on the path. We pray that we can seek well before the Lord, to meditate before the Lord: is our way reaching toward God's goal? God's way and goal has been set and can never be changed. We need to return to the way that God wants us to run in so that only in this way we can finish the entrustment that He has given to us. Today whether the testimony of Jesus can be a reality in us or not depends on if we are in the right way. This is a great test for the saints and the Church in this generation. May the Lord have mercy on us, as His return is so near. Not only should we return to the right way of God, but may we make the way straight. May we meet His return in a good condition. Let us bow in a word of prayer.

Lord, we thank You with all our hearts. You have chosen us according to Your glory. You allow us to live according to Your glorious purpose. We first ask that You enlighten us with a spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that we can come to know the purpose of receiving Your grace. Not only are You willing to bless us, but You also have a glorious entrustment to us. In Your testimony today, whether it can be manifested in us or not, we know it has much to do with the way that we are running. We pray that in Your mercy You will enlighten us, direct our feet onto that path that pleases You. In these last few days may we finish the course. Lord, we need Your grace. Do not allow our days to be spent in vain. Show us Your grace. We believe that as You have gathered us together, it is not in vain, please open our ears so that we can hear Your voice.

Enlighten the eyes of our hearts so that we can see Your glory. Lord, do speak to our hearts in these days. We say that we are here, lift up Your face, may the glory of Your face shine upon us so that we can truly gain what You have desired for us. Lord, we lift up our desire before You, may You accomplish it. Please listen to our prayer. In Jesus most precious Name we pray, amen.