

Our Testimony 2

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WCCC 2001

Ephesians 3: 8 – 11

To me, less than the least of all saints, has this grace been given, to announce among the nations the glad tidings of the unsearchable riches of the Christ, and to enlighten all [with the knowledge of] what is the administration of the mystery hidden throughout the ages in God, who has created all things, in order that now to the principalities and authorities in the heavenlies might be made known through the assembly the all-various wisdom of God, according to [the] purpose of the ages, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord,

Revelations 1: 20

*The mystery of the seven stars which thou hast seen on my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands. -
- The seven stars are angels of the seven assemblies; and the seven lampstands are seven assemblies.*

Let us have a word of prayer.

Dear Lord, our hearts are full of thanksgiving. We want to thank Thee for loving us so much. That of all the people in the world, we are so privileged that we may gather together as one before Thee. We do want to thank Thee that it is Thy grace towards us. We pray that we may not miss Thy grace. We want to open our hearts to Thee. We want to turn our hearts towards Thee. We pray that Thou will shine Thy light upon us. Bring us out of darkness and bring us into Thy light, that in Thy light we may see light, that we may really be transformed and be conformed to Thy image to the praise of Thy glory. Lord we do commit this time into Thy hand. Without Thee we can do nothing but with Thee all things are possible. So our confidence is in Thee. We trust Thy Holy Spirit do Thy work this morning. We pray Thou release Thy word. We pray that Thy word will enter into our heart and that we bear fruits hundred times unto Thee. We praise and thank Thee, in the name of our dear Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Weakness Does Not Affect The Testimony of God and The Testimony of Jesus Christ

We do want to thank God for gathering us together again this morning. I do feel that it is the special grace of God every time we are privileged to gather together. And we do look to the Lord that He will give us special grace. Yesterday morning we shared together on 'Our Testimony'. Our testimony is not concerning ourselves. As a matter of fact, there is nothing to speak of ourselves. Under the light of God we know who we are. We are really but dust. But we praise and thank God that there is much we can talk about. It is not about us but it is about our Lord, Jesus. So our testimony is our Lord, Jesus. Our testimony is the testimony of God. We do testify that God is God and we also testify that Jesus Christ is

the Son of God, the heir of all things. He is the first and the last. He is the living one. He has died but He has been raised from the dead. And He lives forever more. In his hands He holds the keys of death and of Hades. We do testify that Jesus is Lord. So this is our testimony.

Our testimony is a glorious one and our testimony is something that never changes. It stands forever. It is the reality in the universe. It is yesterday, today and forever the same. And we also mentioned yesterday morning that even though our testimony is so certain and strong, yet oftentimes when we testify we are not that strong. It is not because there is anything with the testimony but there is something with us. And this is where we really need to repent so that God will give us special grace so that our witness will be as strong as our testimony.

THE HISTORY OF GOD'S ENTRUSTING OF HIS TESTIMONY TO THE CHURCH

Now this morning we will go a little step further. Knowing what our testimony is, we now want to share together on the church as the vessel of the testimony of Jesus and how God entrusted the testimony of Jesus to the church. In order to understand this, I think probably we will like to go over the whole bible. Of course we have only an hour or so. But we will go over it very quickly in order to see how God entrusts His testimony to the church today.

The Fall of The Archangel And God's Judgment On The Earth

Now we know that in the Book of Genesis, God created the heavens and the earth. But evidently something happened, because when you read Genesis 1:1, it says '*in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*'. When God creates, it must be perfect because our God is a perfect God. He will not let anything go unfinished. What He created must be beautiful. God spoke and it was done. In other words, it does not mean when God creates, He created something unfinished. So we believe in the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the heavens and the earth were perfect. In that creation the highest of the created beings were the angels. But unfortunately, we do not know how long it was before something seemed to have happened in these heavens and the earth. Because when you read the second verse of Genesis chapter 1, it says '*the earth became void and empty*'. That is to say something had happened to this earth. God did not explain it to us in Genesis. But we can find it in some other places in the scriptures. God put one of the angels, the archangel, Lucifer in a very high place. God created him with beauty and talents and God placed him in a high position. He was supposed to lead all the angels to worship God, but instead, pride came into his mind. He began to think of himself. He was supposed to think only of God. He was only to think of his creator and to give all the glory to Him. But somehow he began to think of himself.

You know brothers and sisters, that principle is always true. We should think of our God and we should focus our attention on our Lord Jesus. That is the safest place. Whenever we turn upon ourselves, whenever we look into ourselves, something will happen. So this archangel began to think of himself. He thought of his beauty. He thought of his power. He thought of his position. And pride began to rise in him. He was not satisfied with what God had given him. He wanted to be equal to God. He wanted to compete with the Son of God. And because of this he was driven out of the paradise in heaven. Evidently our universe at that time was under his control. And when he was being driven out, judged, punished and cast out from heaven, that which was under his control also entered into judgment. So we find out that the earth became void and empty. It lost its meaning; it lost its purpose; it was ruined; it was covered with water and ice age came upon this earth. We do not know how long it lasted.

The Reason God Made Man Is To Recover The Earth That Was Destroyed By The Fallen Archangel

But God is love and therefore we find in verse 3 that the Spirit of God hovered over this earth. It was like a mother hen that was brooding over the little chicks; that something might be brought out. In six days, God repaired this earth. He made it habitable and on the last day, the sixth day, He created man. Brothers and sisters, when you read Genesis 1: 26 and 27, you find that God said '*let us make man in our image*'. It seemed there was a counsel among the Godhead. God the father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit held a counsel. They decided what they should do next. And they said let us make man. Brothers and sisters, we men are created very differently from the other creations. We are created in God's own image, after His likeness. Even when God created angels, He did not create angels in His image, according to His likeness. Only with man did He create in His image and according to His likeness. We would like to ask this question. Why it was that God should take a counsel? It had to be something very significant. And why was the decision to make man in their own image and according to His own likeness? That was something tremendous. It was something almost unthinkable. Why was it that God decided to do such a thing and made man in such a manner? It could not be without any special reason. It could not be without any special purpose. So from the word of God, today we know the reason why God created man. The reason why God created man in His own image is because God wants to use man. God wants man to represent Him on earth. God gives men dominion in order that they may rule the earth for God. They are supposed to maintain the testimony of God on earth because the testimony of God on earth was destroyed through the fall of the archangel. And now God raise up men, give them dominion that they may maintain the testimony of God in this universe. Now this is the purpose why God created men in such special ways.

So God put man in the garden of Eden and God made all the trees that man might enjoy the fruits. But in the midst of the garden there was the tree of life and by the side of it there was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Then God said to man, 'of all the trees in the field, you can freely eat'. You know in

the beginning the food of man was fruit. How good it would be that we do not need to eat anything but fruit. That was what was in the beginning. God said 'you can eat all the fruits in the garden. There is only one tree you cannot eat. It is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil'. Why did God say man could not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? It was because on the day he ate of it, he would surely die. Why those very words? You can see the reason God forbade man to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was out of love. You know sometimes we think any prohibition is not love. But here you find behind that prohibition, there was the love of God there. Why? It was because God wanted man to know who He is. Even though God put man above all things, yet he needed to know he is under one. He is still under God. That was the problem with the archangel. God put him in such a high place that he began to think he was above all and not under God anymore. He did not know his place. So God made that prohibition to remind man that he was over all but under one. This is our position. As long as we maintain that position, we are safe. And furthermore, God knows unless we have His own life in us, such knowledge of good and evil will put us to death.

Man Entered Into Death After He Was Deceived

Now I do not know how you feel, but to me I feel that all the trees in the garden of Eden are good. God would never put anything evil in it. The apple tree is good for our body. And I personally think the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was food for our soul. Our soul desires knowledge, and the highest knowledge is the knowledge of knowing good and evil. It is higher than scientific knowledge. And this is the food of our soul. But the tree of life is the food of our spirit. It is the will of God. He put the tree in the midst of the garden and He did not prohibit man from eating it. Now if it is in the center, it attracts your attention. And so in a sense God said I put it before your eyes. This was what God wanted men to do. They are created in God's image. Now they need to take God's life in them and by that they will be able to fulfill their life. They will be able to fulfill life's purpose. But unfortunately man ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil before he took the tree of life. In other words, man rejected God. He did not want to be dependent upon God. He did not want to live by the life of God. He wanted to develop his own soul life and make it great. He was being tempted by the enemy that if you ate of this tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you would know good and evil. You did not need God anymore. You could live an independent life.

God Raised Up Men Who Can Bear His Testimony

Brothers and sisters, that means death. So God said, 'on the day that you eat of this forbidden tree, you shall die'. And because of this, man was driven out of the garden of Eden. In other words, God's purpose for man is that he may testify with a testimony of God. He was on earth to bring all things back to God. He was to lead all creation to worship God. And he could only accomplish that with the life of

God in him and he being dependent on God. But unfortunately you find that he failed in his mission. So he was driven out of the garden of Eden. But the testimony of God must be maintained in spite of the failure of our forefather, Adam. And when you read the book of Genesis, you will find that God's testimony on earth was maintained by the patriarchs. Here you find even though Cain was evil, yet God raised up Abel. When Cain was born, his parents thought that now they had the seed of woman. God commented that the seed of the woman would come. And He would bruise the head of the serpent. So when Cain was born, his parents thought he was the man. But unfortunately he was not. So afterwards, Abel was born and they called Abel 'a breath'. And thank God we find that through Abel the testimony of God was maintained. What was that testimony? Abel really testified to the love of God. God is love. That is His very being. And this was the testimony that Abel maintained on earth. Abel believed that out of the love of God, even though man has sin yet He had prepared a substitute. He prepared a lamb and through the shed blood of the lamb, man's sin might be cleansed. So you find that Abel believed in God's love. He believed in the salvation that God has prepared for man. So when he approached God, he did not approach God on his own. He was not like his brother, Cain. Cain approached God by offering the fruits of his field; the work of his own hand. He thought that God should accept his offering because that was the best he had. He depended on his own to approach God. He did not accept the love of God; the lamb was to be his substitute. So he was rejected. Abel instead, humbled himself before God, acknowledging he was a sinner. The only way we can be accepted by God is through the blood of the lamb. We need to accept the love of God. So here you find through Abel the love of God, the testimony of God was maintained.

Throughout The Ages, God Called Men To Maintain His Testimony

And then you find Enoch. Enoch lived until he was 65 years old. He lived just as other people in the world. But when he was 65 years old, he begot a son, Methuselah. Evidently he received a revelation from God when his son was born. He realized that one day God would judge this world because of the sins of this world. When Methuselah died judgment would arrive. He began to be moved. So he began to walk with God. And the bible said he walked with God for three hundred years. Brothers and sisters, God wants us to walk with Him. But we want God to walk with us. To walk with God, on the one hand, is a most glorious thing. But on the other hand, it is a most difficult thing also. That is why the name Enoch means discipline. He had to be disciplined in order to walk with God. God is holy. If we want to walk with God, we have to be holy; we have to be under discipline. So, as far as man was concerned, those three hundred years were very difficult and yet on the other hand were also very glorious. And he walked with God and walked and walked until he was taken. In those days people might live to hundred years and yet they all died except Enoch. He walked with God and God took him away. So what was the testimony for God that Enoch had maintained? He testified of the holiness of God. In a world full of sins

and full of death, there was a man who testified that God is different; He is uncommon; He is separated; He is unique; He is the only one. Enoch walked with God. He maintained the testimony of God in his generation.

And then you find Noah. The day had come; God wanted to judge the world because the world was full of violence and sin. But there was Noah who received grace from God. He feared God. And God revealed to him and told him to make an ark and with the ark, to save people. For one hundred and twenty years, Noah preached the gospel. He told people that judgment would come. He asked people to come into the ark but nobody believed him. Only Noah and his family, eight people went into the ark. You know it is very interesting if you read the Chinese character. Chinese character in the beginning was picture. What is the picture of a boat? On the one hand, it is a canoe. On the other hand, it is 'eight mouth'. And this 'eight mouth' was Noah and his family. So here you find Noah was saved from destruction through the ark. So what was the testimony that Noah maintained of God? He maintained the testimony of God that God is righteous. God is a righteous God. So there you find again the testimony of God was maintained in spite of the rebellion of the world.

Then you think of Abraham. We know that Abraham lived in Ur of Chaldea and that was a city of idols. Legend tells us that Abraham's father was an idol maker. So Abraham lived in that kind of situation. But somehow Abraham began to think whether these idols they made were real. And we told by legend, not the bible, so do not believe it. It was said one day Abraham's father left home and he told Abraham to take care of these idols. So he left and after his father left, Abraham began to beat these idols. Some of them the heads were off; some the arms were off, and he threw them all over the room. His father came back and he saw this situation and so he asked his son. Why did you do that? Oh his son said, after you left, these idols started to fight each other and that was what happened. His father said, nonsense they could not do that. Then Abraham said why did you worship them? That was legend. But the truth was that one day the God of glory appeared to Abraham. God knew his heart.

So one day the God of glory appeared to him and called him. 'Leave this place, leave your father's house, leave your kindred and go to the place where I called you to'. And by faith Abraham obeyed God. He became a stranger and a sojourner in the Promised Land. He lived in tents and he built altars to worship God. He did not return to his old place. He could do that if he wanted to. But he did not. Why? It was because he saw a city with foundation, of which the builder is God. He looked for that city and that enabled him to be a stranger and a sojourner on earth. He saw the glory of God. He saw what the glory of God had provided for his home. He saw that glorious city. It captivated him and enabled him to reject all the things in this world and to seek for that heavenly heritage. Brothers and sisters, here you find through Abraham, the glory of God, the testimony of God was maintained. He maintained that God is glory and that the glorious God wants to lead us into glory. So he despised the things of this world.

Only A Corporate Vessel Can Fully Manifest God

Brothers and sisters, you find that through the patriarchs God maintained his testimony on this earth. So far as the world is concerned, they rebelled against God. But God still left on earth his testimony through some individuals. And each individual testified a part of the testimony of God because the testimony of God is so huge. It is so full. It is so rich. No one person can bear the whole testimony. Each individual may play a part of it. But for the purpose of God, the vessel of His testimony is corporate. That is God's purpose. And because of this we find that God was gradually leading towards that direction. Out of Abraham came the twelve tribes, and from the twelve tribes, the nation of Israel. So you find gradually God began to lead out of individuals into corporate; that his testimony may be full and perfect. So here you find the nation of Israel. God took them out of Egypt. In Exodus chapter 19 when they came to Mount Sinai, God began to reveal His purpose to them. Why did God deliver them out of Egypt? Why did God deliver them out of slavery? Or did God just wanted to free them so they could live the way they wanted to live? No, God delivered them out with a purpose. So here on earth at Mount Sinai, God began to reveal His mind to them. God said, *'I brought you as on eagle's wings unto Myself. Now if you keep My commandments, if you keep My covenant, I will take you out of all the people in the world to be My people. You will be my people, and I will be your God. You will be a nation of priest to serve me'*. Brothers and sisters, here you find God wants a corporate vessel, a people that belongs to Him. And in order to do that, we have already mentioned again and again, God gave them the ten commandments. God committed His testimony to the nation of Israel. 'Now you are my people and you have a mission - to bear My testimony on earth. When the whole world was idol worshipers, you are the only nation that worshipped one God. You are to bear my testimony on this earth. You are great, not because you are many, not because of what you are; you are great because you have received my statutes and my testaments. In the whole world, there is no nation that has such wisdom and understanding. And of all the nations in the world, there is no such thing as God appearing to you and answering to you. And that is what makes you great and so you have to keep my commandments. And you have to tell your sons, and your sons' sons and their sons that they may be the vessel of my testimony'.

Israel Failed To Maintain God's Testimony

Brothers and sisters, our brother has already mentioned how God dwelt in their midst through the tabernacle and the tabernacle is called the tabernacle of the testimony. And God asked them to make an ark and the ark is the ark of the testimony. And in the ark, they put the ten commandments, and the ten commandments are the testimony. The glory of God rested upon the ark and the tabernacle. Brothers and sisters, do you see the picture? The testimony of God was entrusted to that nation. What a glorious thing it was. The Lord was in their midst. And the King was in their midst. This was what happened to the nation of Israel. What a privilege; but also what a responsibility! Now as you read the history of the

nation of Israel, you will find gradually they failed in the testimony. You find in the beginning how they rebelled against God when God gave them the Promised Land. When they became fat, they forgot God. They began to learn from other nations and began to worship idols which were an abomination to God. You find in 1 Samuel how the ark was captured by the Philistines. You know at that time their faith became a superstition. The ark led them into the Promised Land, the ark fought for them, but at that time, they considered the ark as a thing of superstition. They did not worship God anymore. And when they were defeated by the Philistines they said bring the ark here, God would fight for us. God did not fight for them. God would rather allow the ark to be captured by the Philistines. The children of Israel could not take care of the ark of God. They were supposed to maintain the testimony of God. But because of their sins, the ark was captured by the Philistines. But thank God, the ark knew how to protect itself. So after six months, the ark returned. But they did not care about the ark and the ark was hidden in the house of Abinadab. Even in the days of Saul, he never inquired before God. Brothers and sisters that was the condition of the children of God. There was a revival in the days of David. He had a heart towards God. He searched for the ark. He loved the ark. He would not allow himself to sleep. He wanted to find a resting place for the ark. Solomon built the temple. But unfortunately, the people of Israel continued to rebel against God, even though God sent prophets to warn them, to call them back to God. The love of God was still extended to them. He sent prophets early in the morning to call them back. But they would not turn back. So finally the temple was destroyed. Jerusalem was destroyed. The people were taken into captivity. And during those seventy years, God was never called the God of the heavens and the earth. God was only called the God of heavens. Why? It was because he had no testimony on earth. No one maintained his testimony on earth. The children of Israel have failed God. How sad it was.

A Remnant Faithfully Maintained God's Testimony When The Corporate Vessel Failed To Do So

But did God leave no testimony on earth? It was true that it was a failure in a corporate way. The children of Israel were now in captivity in Babylon. And yet, brothers and sisters, there were still some individuals. There was a man in captivity who maintained the testimony of God on earth. Think of Daniel. Daniel was a captive and yet how he maintained the testimony of God. Even though he was a teenager at that time and he was a captive, yet he would not defile himself. He would not defile himself with the wine and the food of the king. He wanted to keep himself pure for God. Throughout his long life, he served two empires. He was the prime minister and yet three times a day he opened his windows towards Jerusalem and prayed. He stood for God. And because he stood for God, he was thrown into the lion den. Yet God kept him from the mouth of the lions. He testified to the kings that God is the living God. He testified to Nebuchadnezzar that heavens do rule. It was not Nebuchadnezzar who ruled. It was God who put him there. And God rules over the whole earth. What a testimony this was.

And you also find Ezekiel. Ezekiel was a priest in captivity and there he maintained the testimony of God. He told the people it was true that the glory of God had reluctantly left Jerusalem and yet one day the glory of God will return. Dear brothers and sisters, you find that through these individuals God still maintained His testimony on earth in spite of the failure of the nation. And then seventy years later, according to the God's word, Cyrus the Persian king allowed the children of Israel to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. But unfortunately most of the people in captivity remained in the land of captivity. Why? It was because during those seventy years, they were allowed to build their own houses and their own businesses. And so in the land of captivity they were able to live a comfortable life. And more than that, they could not go back to Jerusalem because there was no temple there and they could not offer up the sacrifices. Now what did they do? To satisfy their conscience, they began a very ingenious plan. That was when synagogues began. They could not go back to Jerusalem. There was no temple there. They wanted to worship God.

You know they worshipped idols. So God allowed them to go to Babylon, an idol worshipping nation. Now you wanted to worship idols, so I would let you go to the country where there were lots of idols. This was the way to cure them of their desire to worship idols. This is what mothers usually do. If a child loves ice cream very much, how are you going to help him? You let him eat until he gets tired of it. And this was what God did to the children of Israel. Alright, you wanted to worship idols, just go there where it was full of idols. And fortunately they were cured of idols.

Now they wanted to worship God. But how could they worship God? It was very clever; synagogues. If there were ten men of leisure, they could form a synagogue. They did not need to walk very far and if there was somebody one did not like, one could get some friends and organize a synagogue. In the synagogue, they read the Pentateuch. They also read the prophets. They also sang psalms. They also prayed. They also exhorted one another. It was very free, very good. It satisfied their longings. The only thing they could not do was to sacrifice. Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins. But even though without redemption, somehow their conscience was appeased. And they lived such a comfortable life. Why would they uproot and go to Jerusalem, a ruined place and surrounded by enemies? And why was it that you should build the temple? Was the synagogue not enough? Brothers and sisters, when they thought of themselves it was enough. But if they thought of the testimony of God, that was not enough.

Thank God He kept the spirit of some, fifty thousand of them. They were moved by the Spirit of God. They were willing to leave everything there. They were willing to brave the dangers. They wanted to go back to a ruined Jerusalem for one reason only – to rebuild the temple. In other words, they wanted to maintain the testimony of God because the temple was where the name of God rested. So they lived for the testimony of God. They did not live for themselves.

Brothers and sisters, so here you find how God raised up a corporate vessel. Even though it was not the whole, yet it was a corporate vessel, to maintain the testimony of God at that time. Brothers and sisters, we have been on the type too long. The children of Israel were a type of the church today. The children of Israel were God's earthly people and we are God's heavenly people. They were a shadow and we are the reality.

The Son of God Came To Earth To Recover God's Testimony

So here you find when you come to the New Testament, our Lord Jesus came into this earth. The testimony of God rested in Him. When he came, even though the temple was there, yet we know there was no ark. There was no ark in the holiest of all. There was no glory of God. There was no fire coming down to earth to burn the sacrifice. There was no priest with Urmin and Thurmin. Even though outwardly it seemed everything was there yet actually the most important thing was missing. The presence of God was not there. But when our Lord Jesus came to this earth, He was the real temple, He was the ark. He said *'Lo, I come to do Thy will, You gave me a body and Your law was written upon My heart'*. Dear brothers and sisters, here you find our Lord maintained the testimony of God throughout His life. To Him there was only one thing – My father's will. If it was my father's will to go to the cross, to drink the cup, I would do it. He maintained the testimony of God in spite of all the falsehood and hypocrisy of the nation. How He bore a good confession!

After He accomplished the work of salvation, He ascended up on high. But before He left, in Matthew chapter 16, He said *'on this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it'*. What was the rock? It was not Peter. If Peter was to be the rock, you will find He shook very quickly. But the rock was Peter's confession. He confessed Jesus as Christ, as the Son of the living God. Christ Jesus is the rock of ages and upon Him He will build His own church and that church is to be the vessel of His testimony and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. In Matthew chapter 18:20 the Lord said, *'For where two or three are gathered together unto My name, there am I in the midst of them'*. And then when He was ascending into heaven in Matthew 28, He said *'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them to the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have enjoined you. And behold, I am with you all the days, until the completion of the age'*. So brothers and sisters, after the ascension of our Lord Jesus on the day of Pentecost, you find the Holy Spirit came down on the one hundred and twenty believers and in one Spirit they were baptized into one body and that was when the church began on earth.

The Church Is The Vessel Of The Testimony of God

Now what is the church? You find the church is the vessel of the testimony of Jesus. The Lord entrusted His testimony to the church because the church is the body of Christ, the fullness of Him who fills all and

in all. It is the will of God. Even before the foundation of the world, God has already purposed in His heart that one day the church will be that vessel. Even the principalities and the authorities will learn from the church the manifold wisdom of God. Brothers and sisters, what a glorious privilege it is! So God raised up His church on earth, His own redeemed people, to be filled by Himself and bear witness to Him that Jesus is Lord. When you read the first few chapters of the Book of Acts, what a glorious beginning this was. You will find there on the day of Pentecost three thousand came to the Lord, and they all continued to be in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles. And they all fellowshiped, broke bread and prayed. How they loved one another; how they were together; how they met in the temple; how they enjoyed the meals together; and how they remembered the Lord every day; and how they helped each other. No one said this was mine. Everyone shared whatever he had. Brothers and sisters, and because of this testimony, the Lord began to add daily to them. Then when you come to the fourth chapter, you find they were of one mind and of one soul. How they loved one another; how they manifested Christ together. And people looked at them and people said, 'see how they love one another'. People looked at them and wondered who they were.

They did not belong to the Jews. They did not belong to the Gentiles. They no longer followed the way of the Jews. They did not live according to the form of the Gentiles anymore. They lived differently in spite of being Jews and Gentiles and yet they were one. And there was a special manner of life among them. It was the way of love. The world did not know who they were. So one day, people said, 'we know who they are. They are Christians. They are Christ's man. Because when they gathered, they gathered in the name of Christ. When they prayed they prayed in the name of Jesus. When they sang, they sang to Jesus. When they opened their mouth, they spoke of Jesus. When they lived, they lived out Jesus. They were Christians. What a testimony! They were a vessel bearing the testimony of Christ Jesus. But unfortunately, gradually you find things began to waver. The enemy tried every way to kill the testimony. He used persecution but it did not work. Then he used deception. Gradually you find terrible things come into the church. Gradually you find corruptions came into the church. Gradually you find the church began to drift away from the living faith into the tradition of the fathers. When you came to the dark age, the bible was chained. People did not even know that the first thing was salvation. They did not know grace. They thought they had to save by their merits and they were full of superstition. The testimony of Jesus was in ruin.

But thank God, throughout church history, you find God raised up people. A minority, yes; persecuted yes; and yet they maintained the testimony. So here you find even at the end of the first century, John the apostle was in Patmos. He was exiled to the island of Patmos for the word of Jesus and the testimony of God. And there he received revelation. He saw a vision. He saw seven golden lampstands. And one like the Son of Man walking among them. The seven lampstands represented the seven churches in Asia Minor. When you read Exodus about the golden lampstand, you know it is really strange. In the holy

place, there were three pieces of furniture. You had the golden altar of incense. And you had the golden table of show bread. These two things were made of wood but overlaid with gold. But there was the third furniture and it was the lampstand. The lampstand had no wood in it. It was made of gold, one piece, beaten out. And it was beaten into a lampstand with seven branches and there the light shone. Brothers and sisters, this is what the church is. The church in the mind of God is all gold. We think of the church as men because it is men that compose the church. But strangely, in God's mind it is all gold. There is no wood. Wood represents human. Gold represents divine. It is all gold. Now how can it be? What is the church? You and me meet together, two or three gather together in the name of the Lord and the Lord in their midst. That is the church. If that is the case, all things coming from men were nailed to the cross. So what is the church? It is none but Christ.

But the lampstand is just a lampstand, it is not the light. The lampstand is not an end. It is a means to an end. The purpose of the lampstand is to uphold light. The lampstand is for the light, not for itself. The lampstand is a vessel for the testimony of Jesus. So that is what the church is. So when the church failed in the testimony of Jesus, then the lampstand has lost its meaning. Here in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, you find our Lord as the heavenly high priest. He was there tending the seven lampstands and He was there trying to restore its light. And when He realized the situation, at the end of each letter, there is the call to overcomers. He is calling for overcomers in spite of the failure of the vessel in the testimony of Jesus. That testimony has to be maintained. How? By calling to those who overcome; to overcome the situation; to rise above the situation; to return to the Lord; to return to the word of God; to return to the headship of Christ; to return to the lordship of Christ; and to return to love. Brothers and sisters, the call to overcomers came even at the end of the first century. And this call has been going out through the second century. Thank God throughout the ages and generations, you find there are some people who responded. The testimony of Jesus has never gone out in this world. And brothers and sisters, the call is upon us today. By the grace of God, let us respond.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, our heart desire is to respond to you. Make us overcomers, not for ourselves but for your testimony. We ask in the name of our Lord, Jesus. Amen.