

WCCC 2005

Brother Kaung

The Way to the Eternal Purpose of God

- The Cross and the Church (3)

The Cross and the Testimony of the Church

1 Corinthians 2: 1 – 5. And I, when I came to you, brethren, came not in excellency of word, or wisdom, announcing to you the testimony of God. For I did not judge it well to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling; and my word and my preaching, not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith might not stand in men's wisdom, but in God's power.

Revelation 1: 9, 17 – 18. I John, your brother and fellow-partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and patience, in Jesus, was in the island called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus.

And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead; and He laid His right hand upon me, saying, 'Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the living one; and I became dead, and behold, I am living to the ages of ages, and have the keys of death and of hades.

Revelation 12: 10 – 11. And I heard a great noise in the heaven saying, Now is come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ; for the accuser of our brethren has been cast out, who accused them before our God day and night; and they have overcome him by reason of the blood of the Lamb, and by reason of the word of their testimony, and have not loved their life even unto death.

Let us have a word of prayer:

Dear Lord, our hearts bow low in worship. Who in this universe loves us as You did? We thank Thee that even though we are the most unworthy people, yet Thou was willing to die for us. Lord, our hearts are melted by Thy love. We cannot keep back ourselves from giving over to Thee. Thou have redeemed us for a reason, for a purpose. And Lord, we do desire that Thy purpose will be

fulfilled in each one of us. It is not for ourselves, Lord, it is for Thee. So may Thy name be glorified among Thy people. May Thy purpose be fulfilled among all Thy people, and that glory may fill the universe, and glory to Thee. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.

We do thank the Lord for being so faithful to us. In the last few days, He has gathered us together before Him. That is His love. He does not want us to meet Him with shame. He is coming soon, and He wants us to meet Him with joy and glory. And this is the reason why He gave us this opportunity. Our prayer is that what He has said to us will become reality in our lives. There is nothing more important than the eternal purpose of God. We thank God that it pleases Him to reveal that purpose to us. And we thank God that He has also shown us the way to that purpose. Our dear brother Lance mentioned the cross and Christ. In that eternal purpose of God, God's Son is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. He came into this world to die – not for Himself; He has no need to die and God never dies, but He died for you and for me. On Calvary's cross, the One who knows no sin died for us sinners that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. What amazing love this is! Our Lord went to the cross for our sake. On the cross, He accomplished the work that God sent Him to do. And He also calls us to follow Him in the way of the cross because that is the way that will lead us to the eternal purpose of God.

The Scripture says, *'By the eternal Spirit, He offered Himself spotless to God, purifying us in our conscience from dead work that we may worship the living God.'* So our dear brother Christian tells us that it is the Holy Spirit that leads to the cross and the cross will again lead us to the Spirit. This is the principle that is universal.

The cross is the only way to the eternal purpose of God. Out of the cross of our Lord Jesus comes the church. The church is His own body and when that body is fully grown, then He will come back and take her as His bride. The body of Christ, the church, is born out of the cross of our Lord Jesus, and it is built, matured and completed also through the cross. That is the reason why our Lord Jesus calls us to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him. If we try to avoid our cross, then we find that we are not growing in Christ. So how necessary it is that the cross must work in our lives! It will purify us, it will sanctify us, and it will transform us. If we love our Lord Jesus, we love the cross. We know that the cross originally was a sign of sin, of shame, of death and of curse. But our Lord Jesus has transformed it into a symbol of love, of peace, of life and of victory. And that is the reason why today we glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus.

The Lampstand

In this concluding message, we would like to fellowship on the cross and the testimony of the church. We know that the church is the body of Christ. It is the fulness of Him who fills all and in all. All the riches of the head dwell in that body, and that body is the means to manifest the glory of the head. But the church is also an instrument in the hand of God. It is an instrument for His testimony, and that is the reason why we find the church is sometimes described as a golden lampstand. We find that in Revelation 1.

The apostle John was exiled to the island of Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus. And there on the Lord's Day, he heard a loud voice behind him. When he turned around, he saw a vision. He saw that there were seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like the Son of Man. We know that before John was exiled, he was laboring for the Lord in Asia, that is Asian Minor, but after he was exiled to that island, he was not able to serve the brothers and sisters he loved so much. No wonder that on the Lord's Day he might be sitting on a rock facing over the Aegean Sea because there he could see faintly the outline of Asia. He had to be thinking about the churches that he had served, but there was nothing he could do. It was under that kind of circumstance he heard a loud voice behind him, and when he turned, he saw that vision. And the Lord Himself explained to us that the seven lampstands were the seven churches in Asia. So we find that before God, the church is a lampstand.

What is a lampstand? A lampstand is an instrument that holds the light and lifts up the light. The lampstand is not an end in itself. The lampstand is a means to an end. The purpose of a lampstand is for the light. Even today, sometimes people use a lampstand as an ornament, but that lampstand will cry out and say, 'I have lost my purpose.'

The church does not speak for herself. Her testimony is the testimony of Jesus. Our Lord Jesus is always at the front, and the background is the lampstand.

The Law is the Testimony of God

In the Old Testament time, God delivered the children of Israel out of Egypt and brought them to Himself at Mount Sinai. He told them that if they kept His commandments, then they would be His people and He would be their God. And to differentiate them from all the nations as a possession of His own, He gave them the Law, the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments in the word of God are also the testimony of God. So far as God is concerned, the Ten Commandments that He gave are His testimony. No one knows God. God is the greatest mystery in the universe. We know Him only because He reveals Himself, and our God revealed Himself in giving the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments speak to us of God. What a God He is! In the Ten Commandments you have two tables of stone: on one table of stone were

inscribed four commandments and on the other one six commandments. On the first table of stone there are four commandments and these four commandments show us that God is holy. Aside from Him there is no other God. That is holy. Holy means separated, unique, altogether different. God is the only true God. There is no other God. No one is like Him. That is His holiness. And because He is so holy, He cannot be represented by any image. He is Spirit, and we must worship Him in spirit and in truth. Because He is holy, therefore His name should be respected. We cannot idly use His name. And we must keep Sabbath, that is, rest in His finished work. So in the first table of stone, He shows us that He is most holy. That is why, not only in the Old Testament time, even into the New Testament, when there is a vision of the glory of God, the cherubim, the living creatures will cry out, 'Holy, Holy, Holy'. He is all by Himself. He is above everything. He cannot be compared. And He is the only One who needs to be worshipped.

On the second table of stone were the six commandments, and these six commandments are concerned with the righteousness of God. God is holy, and God is righteous. He is holy in His nature; He is righteous in His actions. And because He is righteous, therefore He wants His people to be righteous. So the Ten Commandments, so far as God is concerned, are His testimony. He has to testify of Himself because there is no one who can testify for Him. No one knows Him, so He has to tell us who He is and what kind of God He is. But He gave these Ten Commandments, the Law, to the redeemed people of Israel. When the Ten Commandments reached the hands of the children of Israel it became law. To God it is testimony; to the nation of Israel, it is law. If they kept the law, they would be God's people. If they violated the law, they would be under God's chastisement. So here is the testimony of God and the vessel, the instrument of that testimony. This was most important in the Old Testament time because the whole world did not know God. Only the chosen people, the nation of Israel, were supposed to be a nation who belonged to God. By keeping the law, they would testify to the whole world who God is. What a testimony that should be! But unfortunately, the children of Israel failed to keep the law. And because they failed to keep the law, not only would they themselves be chastised, but the nations failed to know the living God.

The Testimony is Fulfilled in Jesus

In the New Testament time, we find the testimony of God is now centered in the testimony of Jesus. Or we may say the testimony of God finds its fulfillment in the testimony of Jesus.

What is the testimony of Jesus? A testimony is something you personally experience. A testimony is something you personally see or hear. A testimony cannot be second hand. It cannot be just handed down. It must be something for which you yourself are present; something happened and you are there. Such testimony is powerful and such testimony has power in the court.

What is the testimony of Jesus? As a matter of fact, the whole Bible is the testimony of Jesus. You remember after the resurrection of our Lord Jesus, two of His disciples left Jerusalem on the way to Emmaus. As they were walking towards Emmaus, they talked to each other with sadness and sorrow. Suddenly a man came and joined them and asked these two disciples, 'What are you talking about? Why are you so sad?' These two men said, 'Do you not know what happened in Jerusalem? Everybody should know that Jesus, whom we believed to be the Messiah, was crucified. He was dead and He was buried.' All their hopes were dashed. It was the end of their life. And that Man said to them, 'Oh, you foolish and slow in believing. Do you not know the Messiah must first suffer and then be glorified?' And on the road that man opened up the Old Testament to them. He explained to them how all the Law and prophets point to the Messiah, and that Messiah had to suffer and then be glorified. While they were listening to these words, their hearts were warmed. When they arrived at Emmaus, that Man seemed to be going on, so they forced Him to stay back with them. It was in the evening, so they sat down and broke bread. That Man broke the bread and gave it to them, suddenly their eyes were opened. It was Jesus. Then Jesus disappeared. And because they had seen Him, they had the strength to go back to Jerusalem. It was no longer the end; it was the beginning of their lives.

Brothers and sisters, every time when we break the bread, it is the desire of my heart that my eyes are opened to see it is He. And it is He who is the One who breaks the bread; He is the One who passes the cup. And that should strengthen us to return to the original purpose of God.

Then you remember in Luke 24 on that night the two men returned to Jerusalem and saw the other disciples who were gathered there. They said, 'The Lord has appeared to Peter.' And these two men began to tell them what happened to them. While they were fellowshiping, suddenly the Lord Himself appeared and said, 'Little children, peace be with you.' They were amazed. It was too good to be true. So our Lord said, 'Do you have anything to eat?' They gave Him a piece of fish and a honeycomb, and our Lord ate with them to show that He was really resurrected. Then our Lord Jesus opened the whole Old Testament to them. From the Law and the prophets and the Psalms, He told them that all must be fulfilled in Him, that He must suffer and then be glorified.

What is the testimony of Jesus? According to the Old Testament, the Law, the prophets and the Psalms all testified that Christ must suffer and then be glorified. Not only that, but in the beginning of the New Testament, in the beginning of the dispensation of grace, we find John the Baptist who was the forerunner of Christ. And he was preaching, 'Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn nigh.' Then he saw Jesus coming to be baptized, and somehow John sensed in his spirit that this Man did not need to be baptized. He had nothing to repent of. So he said to this Man, 'I need to be baptized by You. Why do You come to be baptized by me? You have no need to be baptized.'

And our Lord Jesus said, 'Suffer it to be in order to fulfill all righteousness.' At that particular juncture it is the will of God that they had to repent and be baptized for the kingdom of the heavens was drawing near. At that time, our Lord Jesus took upon Himself all our sins. He offered Himself as a substitute for us. If ever there was a man baptized for another person, that is the Lord Jesus. If people try to baptize for another person today, it is useless, but our Lord Jesus was baptized in our stead.

John the Baptist Testifies

When our Lord Jesus came out of the water, something happened. The Spirit of God descended on Him like a dove and abode in Him. Not only did our Lord Jesus see it, John saw it too. John saw it personally, so he testified, 'This is the Son of God.' Then our Lord Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted. After He was tempted for forty days, He came back in the power of the Holy Spirit. As He walked by, John the Baptist saw Him and he cried out, 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.' The next day, John the Baptist was with two of his disciples and Jesus was walking by. Again, John cried out, 'Behold the Lamb of God.' And his two disciples left him and followed Jesus. So John the Baptist is a witness to Jesus.

The Father Testifies

But there is much more. We find even the heavenly Father testified of His own Son. According to the record of the Bible, three times the heaven opened and a voice came from the holy One: 'This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. He is My delight; hear Him.' What a testimony given to our Lord Jesus.

Jesus Testifies of Himself

Our Lord Jesus was once questioned by the people, and He said, 'I am the light of the world.' And the Pharisees said, 'You are testifying of Yourself, therefore Your testifying is not true' (See John 8). Our Lord Jesus said, 'Even if I testify of Myself, My witness, My testimony is true because I know where I come from and I know where I am going.'

If we testify of ourselves that is not true because we do not know ourselves. But our Lord Jesus is different. He knows where He comes from. He comes from above. He comes from the Father. He is God. And He knows where He is going. He is going back to His Father by way of the cross. Because He knows Himself, His testimony is trustworthy.

What does He say of Himself? In Revelation 1, when John saw that vision on the island of Patmos, it was so majestic, so powerful that he fell down as dead. John the apostle was the one who knew Jesus most intimately. Among the apostles, he was the first one who followed the Lord. He and Andrew were the first two. He was so close to our Lord Jesus. He was the one whom Jesus loved, and during the last supper, he leaned upon the breast of our Lord Jesus. He

knew the Lord more than anybody else, but when he saw the glory of the Lord, he fell as one dead. Of all the apostles of the Lord Jesus, only John saw our Lord's death on the cross. He was at the foot of the cross, and he could see so clearly, that he could even see the blood and the water coming out with the spear. He knew Jesus crucified. But on the island of Patmos, when he saw the risen Christ, when he saw Christ in glory, when he saw Christ as the great High Priest in heaven, that was something he had never seen before. He was full of fear, and he fell as dead. Our Lord laid His hand on him and said, 'Fear not.'

Then the Lord gave His own testimony: 'Who am I? I am the first and the last.' He is the beginning and He is the end. He is the Alpha and the Omega. Everything comes out of Him, and everything will return to Him. He is God. He is God's only begotten Son. Our Lord said, 'I am the living one.' He is the source of life. He is eternal life, and yet He said, 'I became dead.' He came into this world to be crucified, to die and to be buried for our sakes. But that is not the end because He is risen: overcoming death, overcoming the one who has the power of death, overcoming everything, and He lives forever more. And He said, 'I hold the keys of death and hades.' That is the testimony of Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, let us be very clear. What is the testimony of Jesus? The testimony of Jesus is Christ crucified and glorified, and this testimony is entrusted to the church. The church is to bear the testimony of Jesus, to tell the world of Christ crucified and to tell the world of Christ glorified. Thank God, in the days of the apostles that was the way they bore the testimony of Jesus.

Peter Testifies

We remember that Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost and gave the first gospel message. If you read carefully, you find what he said about the Lord Jesus: Christ crucified and glorified – 'Jesus whom you crucified, God has raised up and anointed as Christ and Lord.' That is bearing the testimony of Jesus.

This testimony of Jesus is entrusted to the church, but as we mentioned before, to bear testimony needs personal experience. If the church is to bear the testimony of Jesus, not only should they know the fact but that fact must have affected their lives. Then the testifier and the testimony will become one. If we bear testimony of something that happened and these things did happen, these things are very real, very true. But supposed something happened and we were not there; we only knew about it because it was told to us. If we go to the court and bear testimony, we are a very weak witness; the court will not accept it. That does not change the fact, but that fact cannot be established by that witness. So if we want to bear the testimony of Jesus, something must be done personally, deeply in us. We can even say we were there; we experienced it. The cross of Christ is something that we have experienced. It has worked in our lives. The glory of our Lord is something that we have personally experienced because His glory has touched us and we have been glorified. Then our testimony will be powerful.

Paul Testifies

The apostle Paul in 1Corinthians 2 said, 'I come to announce the testimony of God.' He came to Corinth to announce the testimony of God, which is the testimony of Jesus. It was not in persuasive words, not with human wisdom. He was determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified because this is the very essence of the testimony of Jesus. And then in 2Corinthians 4: 5, he said, '*For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus Lord, and ourselves your bondmen for Jesus' sake.*'

Paul did not come to Corinth to preach himself; he came to Corinth to preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Then in 2Corinthians he said, 'We do not preach ourselves. There is nothing to say about ourselves. All we preach is Jesus Christ Lord. He is Lord; He is glorified because when He ascended on high, God has glorified Him. God has given Him a name that is above every name, and in that name every knee shall bow, every tongue must confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God.' This is the testimony of Jesus – Christ crucified and glorified.

But in order to bear that testimony Paul said, '*And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling; and my word and my preaching, not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power*' (1Corinthians 2: 3 – 4).

In announcing the testimony of Jesus, Paul said, 'I am in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.' Some people say this was because of his physical condition because Paul traveled in the Roman province of Galatia, and he traveled in places where malaria was very common, and most likely Paul got malaria. If you have malaria, it weakens your constitution, and when it strikes, you begin to tremble. So people say that because of malaria Paul lost his good eyesight. But we believe there is something deeper. There is a spiritual reality: 'I am in weakness; a thorn is in my body. That thorn is a stake in my body. It makes me weak, but when I am weak, then I am strong because His power is perfected in my weakness.'

He said, 'I am in fear.' Who was he afraid of? Saul the Pharisee was a brave person. He was not afraid of anything. People were afraid of him. But he said, 'I am in fear.' He was not afraid of the Roman Empire. He was not afraid of the scribes and the Pharisees. He was afraid of himself. He was afraid he himself might come forth. And he trembled at the word of God. We know in Isaiah that the heavens cannot contain our God. Heaven is His throne; the earth is His footstool, but He dwells with those who are of a contrite heart and tremble at God's word.

Do we tremble at the word of God? We are too brave with God's word. We need to tremble at His word. It shows that the cross has worked into his very being. The messenger of the cross knows what the cross is, and because of this his testimony is powerful.

John Testifies

It was the same way with the apostle John. He was in the island of Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus. Thank God we have the testimony of Jesus, and this testimony has been entrusted to the church. But how much has the church fulfilled that trust? You remember towards the end of the first century when John saw the vision on the island of Patmos, the Lord said to him, 'Write to the seven churches in Asia.' At the beginning of each of the seven letters, the Lord gave a part of the description of the vision in the first chapter. In the vision, he showed people who He is, what He is, and so in every letter, it is headed by a part of the vision. The reason is that no one local assembly is able to bear the full testimony of Jesus. We need all the churches joined together to bear that testimony.

The Church Testifies

What was our Lord Jesus looking for in those seven churches? Those seven churches were seven lampstands before God. They had been entrusted with the testimony of Jesus. How effective were their testimonies? Our Lord Jesus, as the High Priest to the church, was there watching; He was trying to find Himself in them. He was not looking for their labor. He was not looking for their works. He was not looking for their knowledge or even their discernment. He was not looking for their good deed or even their sufferings. He was not looking for these things. He was looking for Himself in these churches. Can He find what He has revealed and entrusted to them? Nothing can satisfy Him except Himself because these churches are entrusted with the testimony of Jesus. But we find most of the seven churches failed in their testimony. And because of this, at the end of each letter, there is the word: 'He who has ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes....'

So far as the church in general is concerned, even towards the end of the first century, the church had failed in the testimony of Jesus. But thank God, God never fails. So out of this general declension, the general failure, His testimony cannot fail. It has to be borne, so He is calling for overcomers in the church. Overcomers are not super Christians. Overcomers are normal Christians, those who are faithful to what they are entrusted with. To those who are entrusted with more, more is required, but they are faithful to what the Lord has revealed to them. And those who overcome, that is, overcome the declension, overcome the failure to the testimony, and are faithful to what our Lord has shown them, faithful to Christ crucified and glorified, they will be rewarded in the kingdom.

The Overcomers

Brothers and sisters, how about today? We have mentioned again and again that when the body of Christ, the church, is fully grown, then our Lord Jesus will come back and claim His bride. But as we look at the church today, it seems as if it is farther and farther away. If that is the case, will our Lord Jesus delay

and delay forever? How can God's purpose be fulfilled? In the overcomers. They overcome the accusers because of the blood of the Lamb. It is not because they are better than anybody else. They have their failures, but they know the blood of the Lamb. They know the cleansing of the precious blood.

They overcome because of the word of their testimony. In other words, when they testify, it is true. When they testify Christ crucified, they know what the cross means because it has worked in their lives. When they say Jesus is Lord, they know what it means because they are under the Lordship of Christ, and their word is powerful.

They love not their soul-life even unto death. They are willing to lay down themselves. If they are not dead martyrs, they are living martyrs. They follow the Lamb wherever He goes. When that is completed, God will take it as for the whole church.

What a responsibility we are entrusted with! We cannot afford to be careless. It is time for us to wake up. Thank God that He has faith in us, that He is willing to entrust the testimony of Jesus to us. Can we fail Him? May the Lord have mercy on us.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord Jesus, Thou have entrusted to us Thyself. Thou have entrusted the cross and the glory to us. We pray that we may know Thy suffering and Thy glory, that we may be faithful witness to Thee. Make us a people who not only wait for Thee but hasten Thy return. Not only in our prayer but in our lives, we are waiting for Thee. As we return to our various places, may we be faithful witnesses to Thee. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.