

RECOVERING THE TESTIMONY OF CHRIST

Revelation 2:5—Remember therefore whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works: but if not, I am coming to thee, and I will remove thy lamp out of its place, except thou shalt repent.

Revelation 21:1-7—And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea exists no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of the heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice out of the heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall tabernacle with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, their God. And he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall not exist any more, nor grief, nor cry, nor distress shall exist any more, for the former things have passed away. And he that sat on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he says to me, Write, for these words are true and faithful. And he said to me, It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to him that thirsts of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be to him God, and he shall be to me son.

May we have another word of prayer:

Dear Lord, as we continue together in Thy presence, our hearts are full of gratitude. How we praise and thank Thee that Thou art the One who saves us—and saves us to the uttermost. And this is all for Thy own glory. We thank Thee for the privilege of having gathered together before Thy table. We thank Thee for bringing us out of ourselves and bringing us completely and totally to Yourself. Thou art truly the first and the last. Dear Lord, if Thou still hast something to say to us, will Thou please, by Thy Spirit, release Thy word. Thou knowest each and every one of us. Thou are the One who knows us so well. Will Thou deliver us completely by Thy word and bring us into the reality of the testimony of Jesus? Dear Lord, our hearts are open to Thee. Speak Lord, Thy servants heareth. In Thy precious name we pray. Amen.

I would like to re-emphasize one thing here. There is nothing more important than the testimony of Jesus, because it is the very heart of the eternal purpose of God. The whole word of God is centered upon this theme. God's heart is upon His beloved Son, and it is His good pleasure to reveal His Son in us. It is not only knowledge, but it is a life. It is the testimony of Jesus being constituted into our very being. It is what our Lord Jesus is, and it is to become what we will be.

THE UNCHANGING TESTIMONY OF CHRIST

We will be conformed to His very image, and this is what God really desires, in order that His Son might be the One who sums up all things. The testimony of Jesus itself is complete and perfect. There is never a time when there is anything lacking in the testimony of Jesus. Before the foundation of the world, God the Father, according to His good pleasure, purposed a will, and that will is the testimony of Jesus. Of course, we all know that with God there is no time and space difference. What He purposed is already fulfilled. So the testimony of Jesus from eternity to eternity is a reality.

When we speak of the recovery of the testimony of Christ, it does not mean that it needs to be recovered because, as far as God is concerned, it is an eternal fact. What it means is that the testimony of Jesus needs to be recovered by the church. God has entrusted the testimony of Jesus to His own church, not only for the sake of testifying to it by words, but He wants the testimony of Jesus to be so constituted and built into the life of the church that the testimony of Jesus becomes one with the church. And this is something that needs to be recovered. Therefore, when we are talking about recovering the testimony of Christ, let us remember that this testimony never changes. It has not only been purposed, but it has already been fulfilled. It only talks about its relationship with us.

GOD’S LOVE ENTRUSTS THE TESTIMONY OF CHRIST TO MAN

I often wonder how it could be that God would ever commit the testimony of Jesus to man. God knows everything. He knows what man is. He knows what will happen to man. He knows that if He should commit His testimony to us, we will spoil it. He knows everything beforehand, and yet He is willing to entrust His testimony or Himself to His church. To me that is a great mystery. The only reason we can give is that God is love. He loves us so much that He wants to give everything to us, and that everything is His beloved Son. He wants the testimony of Jesus to become our very being so that we will be able to manifest Christ in everything, and He will be glorified in His church. It is out of His unspeakable love that He commits, as it were, the testimony of Jesus to us because He has enough faith in Himself. His being is love and faith, and out of His own being, He acts. It is not because He does not know us; it is because He knows us so well. Nevertheless, He has faith in Himself and He believes that He is able to do the impossible. Therefore, when we talk about recovering the testimony of Christ, let us remember that no matter what happens to us, God is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is the One who makes the impossible possible. Hence, in the restoring of the testimony of Christ in the church, we have to remember this fact. Otherwise, we will be discouraged. But when we look away from ourselves and look steadfastly upon God, we know that it is possible.

THE CORPORATE TESTIMONY OF CHRIST

The testimony of Jesus is all that Jesus is and this is committed to the church, because the church is the body of Christ, the fulness of Him who fills all and in all. The Holy Spirit calls the church, *the* Christ. In 1 Corinthians 12:12a it says, “The body is one and has many members.” There are many members but one body. We all know that this means the church, and yet the Holy Spirit says, “This is the Christ.” The reason is that in the church, in the body of Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither bondman nor freeman, neither barbarian, nor Scythian. “It is Christ all and in all” (see Colossians 3:11). And this is what is meant by the recovery of the testimony of Christ. It is not just an individual matter. Of course, there is that aspect, and we find that in Romans 8:29: “Because whom he has foreknown, he has also predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son.” This is the personal aspect; but there is a corporate aspect. In the church we see nothing but Christ, which is the testimony of Jesus. That is what the church is supposed to testify of.

MAN'S FAILURE TO BEAR THE TESTIMONY OF CHRIST

Sadly, we all know that whenever God has entrusted anything to man, he has always failed Him. From the very beginning of human history, when God created man in His own image according to His likeness, He gave him the dominion over the birds of the air, the beasts of the field and the fish of the water. And He commanded man to till the ground and to guard the garden. But we find that very quickly man failed, and this is seen throughout the whole Bible. In the Old Testament time, God committed His testimony to the nation of Israel, and yet Israel failed Him. In the same way, God committed the testimony of Jesus to the church, and the church also failed Him.

So how can this impossible work of recovering the testimony of Christ become possible? If it depended upon us, it would be impossible. But thank God, when it comes to the matter of recovering the testimony of Jesus, it is always God Himself who takes the initiative.

In the Old Testament times when Israel failed in its mission, when the temple was destroyed, and they were in Babylonian captivity, how did God recover His testimony? In Jerusalem, the temple that had borne the name of God was destroyed. And when the temple was destroyed, during that short period, God was no longer called the God of the heavens and of the earth. He was only addressed as the God of the heavens because there was no testimony of God upon the earth. They were in Babylonian captivity for seventy long years, and they settled themselves in that exiled land. Who initiated the recovery? God Himself stirred the heart of King Cyrus to proclaim that if anyone wanted to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the house of God, he could do so. You would have thought that all of the Jewish people in captivity would have risen up and returned, but to our surprise we find that only a remnant returned.

The Bible tells us how God stirred the spirits of Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and other people to be willing to be uprooted from their settled homes. They had already established businesses and built their own houses; yet when the spirit of God stirred their hearts, they rose up and returned to Jerusalem.

We know that Zerubbabel was born in captivity and had never seen the temple before. But it was God who stirred his heart and the hearts of other people that they were willing to be uprooted. They were willing to brave all the dangers before them to return to Jerusalem, which at that time was in ruin. Not only was the temple burned, but the houses also were burned. Seen from human eyes, there was nothing there. They seemed to be so foolish to leave plenty and to go into poverty. However, their return was for one thing only. They did not go back for themselves; they went back for God alone. They went back to rebuild the temple in order for God to have a name upon the earth. They went back to proclaim that God was not only the God of heaven, but He is also the God of the earth.

In like manner, when we come to New Testament times, we find that the church was taken into captivity. This simply means that it abandoned the testimony of Jesus and went into Babylon. They lacked the purity and simplicity of Christ and went into confusion and corruption. How will God recover the testimony of Christ in His church? We will find the same principle applies.

FROM THE FEW TO THE MANY

Recovery begins with God. In His mercy, through His Spirit, He begins to stir up some people. We find it strange that when we look into the recovery history of the church, it seems as if God has His own timing. And when the time is full, God will usually touch one person or a few people. There is a principle of the one and the many. It seems as if God always lays His hand upon someone, or some ones. The Spirit of God comes to them, opens their eyes, and they begin to see the vision that has been lost to the church. Today, the church has lost its vision. Without vision, the people perish.

What is the vision? The vision is the testimony of Jesus. When we lose the vision, we are in darkness. We do not know where we are. We will be so content with our present situation that we will be like the Laodiceans—neither cold nor hot. We will still think that we have everything. We do not know that we are blind and do not see what God sees. We do not know that we are naked and do not have the righteousness in us. We do not even sense our miserable state. It is when the light from God comes to someone or a few people that the Spirit of God can begin to work in their lives. They begin to see that they are not in the right place. How do they know they are not in the right place unless they are shown what is right? In other words, they receive the vision of the testimony of Christ that has long been forgotten.

This happened in the Old Testament times. When the whole world had deserted God and became idol worshippers, there was one person, Abraham, to whom the God of glory appeared in Ur of the Chaldeans. Without vision, we do not know the difference—everybody is doing it. We do not realize where we are. But when vision, light or revelation comes from God, we begin to see that we have been in the wrong place. Therefore, in this matter of the recovery, God has to take the initiative. And when He begins, it is always with revelation or vision, under which we begin to see that we have departed.

We have mentioned that declension is departing from the original, and that is always the beginning. We see this in Revelations 2:5: “Remember therefore whence thou art fallen.” How can we remember? It is only when God begins to stir our hearts. He begins to reveal the original vision to us. He shows us what the testimony of Jesus really is, and only then do we realize from whence we have fallen. And then the one or the few who have received that vision go through a time of travail. The Spirit of God begins to work in their lives to show them that they have fallen. Then they are able to repent because of how they have fallen. It always begins in this way. God works in the lives of one or a few, and they go through deep travailing before the Lord brings them out. And through their ministry, the recovery will begin to spread. So it is always from one to many.

FROM SMALL TO GREAT

Not only that, as we look into the process of recovery, we find that it always begins small. But when the human heart wants to do something, it always has to do something big. I once heard someone say, “I will not open my mouth and testify till three thousand can be saved.” This is human nature. But as we look into the history of recovery, we find that it always begins small, and it is from small that it becomes great.

When the remnant returned to Jerusalem and began to lay the foundation of the house, they were persecuted, and because of all these problems, the work of rebuilding the temple stopped. After they had stopped for about fifteen years, God used two prophets—Haggai and Zechariah—to prophesy to the people. Haggai was an old man and he must

have seen the original temple in Jerusalem. Zechariah was a young man, and he had never seen the first temple. However, God raised up these two prophets, and through their prophecies, Zerubbabel and Jeshua, and the others began to work again.

They laid the foundation and started to build. We know from the Scriptures that the temple built by Solomon was so gorgeous, so beautiful, so glorious, and so costly, and some of the people who were working on the temple had seen it before. The people who were working on the rebuilding of the temple were few in number, and their resources were very limited. And while they were building, some of them began to be disappointed. They began to think that they could not build a temple as wonderful and glorious as the former one; therefore, why should they spend their time building another one? Then the two prophets encouraged them. In Zechariah 4:10 he said something like this: “Do you see that this is the day of small things? Do not despise it because this is just the beginning, and the whole work will be finished. These are the eyes of Jehovah which run to and fro in the whole earth.” In other words, it is by the Spirit of God.

Then in Haggai 2:6-7 you will find that God will one day shake not only the earth, but also the heavens, and the latter glory of the house will be greater than the former glory. Thus, in the recovery process of the testimony of Christ, it always begins small, and then gradually it becomes great.

THE RECOVERY PROCESS

Baptism

For instance, in the history of the recovery of the church, you find there were some who began to see this matter of baptism, because at that time people were baptized by sprinkling. They even had the wrong teaching of baptismal regeneration, so people tried not to be baptized until they were dying. They would be on their death beds and wanted to be baptized in order to have all their sins forgiven so that they could go to heaven. And infants were being baptized so that they would be holy. There were all kinds of strange teachings and practices. But among the multitude, there were some people whose hearts were being stirred by the Holy Spirit, and they began to see the real meaning of baptism.

There are some people who say that if you believe in the Lord Jesus, you will be saved, so why get baptized? It is unnecessary. But remember what our Lord Jesus said: “Go to the nations and disciple them, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” In other words, baptism has a very important place in our life with the Lord. Even though our sins were washed away by the blood—not by water—yet that water saves us in the sense that now we are separated from the world.

When the children of Israel were in Egypt, they belonged to Pharaoh, but by the blood of the Lamb on Passover, they were saved from death. However, they had to cross the Red Sea to be saved from Pharaoh and Egypt and to belong to Moses.

In the early centuries, God began to open the eyes of some people, and they saw the real meaning of baptism. They began to be baptized according to the word of God, and they were called in those days Anabaptists, and they were persecuted. They were told: “If you want to be baptized I will baptize you.” They would tie a stone on them and throw them into the water and drown them. Many died because of their faith, and as a result, baptism by immersion or believer’s baptism is a very common thing among God’s people today.

So in the process of recovery, it always begins with a few and spreads to many. It always begins with the small and then becomes big. In the recovery process everything that concerns the testimony of Jesus is recovered in this way.

We are told that the church entered into the Dark Ages. This means that everything about the testimony of Jesus was lost. At that time, people tried to be saved by merits because even salvation by grace through faith was lost. Everything concerning the testimony of Christ was lost in the church. That is why we say that the church has become a religion; it is no longer a living faith. But thank God, throughout church history He began to recover one thing after another, so that the whole vision and revelation of Christ might become the property of the church.

Breaking of Bread

The same thing is true with the breaking of bread and how it had deviated from the vision. But thank God, He touched the hearts of a few. Oftentimes, the recovery of the testimony of Christ in the church begins with the breaking of bread. We know that in the nineteenth century, there were a few who began to see the importance of the breaking of bread. In Ireland there were a few brothers who began to see the truth from the Scriptures for the breaking of bread.

In Acts 2:42, in the days following Pentecost the believers persevered continually in the teaching and the fellowship of the apostles, and in the breaking of bread and prayer. But then the breaking of bread was lost and became a ritual. There was no longer life in it. Then God raised up a few people again and somehow restored the vision of the breaking of bread. They began to see that this is to remember the Lord, to exhibit the finished work of Christ to the world, and to wait for the return of the Lord Jesus. And they began to break bread together—but not under any official ministers. They just broke bread simply to remember the Lord, and today it has spread. This is the way of recovery. So the Bible tells us: “Remember wherein ye have fallen and then repent.”

Repentance

What is repentance? Repentance is a change of mind. We cannot change our own mind. It is the Holy Spirit who changes our minds because He has shown us the right direction. We remember from where we have fallen. Repentance is not only to repent of the past; we repent unto something that is right and do the thing that we have done at first.

To the church in Ephesus, the Lord said, “I know your works.” They already had works, so when they were told to return to do the first works, does it mean that they were just to do the work that they did before? Outwardly, it could be. But inwardly, there is a difference. The inner spring is now there, so that it is not just a matter of the outward works. When you do these same works, you do so with a different spirit, and it is living and real.

So we can see that the recovery of the testimony of Jesus has to begin with the heart. What begins within will be expressed outwardly. It does not mean that we just repent and stop there. Once we have repented, we practice what is right, and that will be a testimony to the world. This is the process of recovery.

THE CALL FOR OVERCOMERS

Then we find the principle of overcoming. At the end of the letters to the seven churches, there is a call for overcomers: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies, to him that overcomes.” Who are the overcomers? The overcomers are those who respond to the revelation or the testimony of Jesus that is given. That is why in the beginning of every letter there is a revelation of Christ. Overcomers are those who respond to Christ. Whatever Christ has revealed to them, they obey. There is no rigid standard for the overcomers.

Who are the overcomers? To what height do I have to reach to become an overcomer? There is no rigid standard for overcomers. God does not apply the same standard to everybody. The only principle concerning overcomers is whatever God has revealed of Christ to us, we have fully obeyed. Then we are an overcomer. To a new believer the standard of being an overcomer is different from maybe a believer of sixty years. If we obey the Lord as He has revealed Himself to us, then we are an overcomer. We may be an overcomer for a time, just like the people in Philadelphia, and then lose the crown. What is the reason for this? As the Lord begins to reveal Himself more and more to us, desiring that Christ will be even more to us, but we only obey Him to a certain point and then stop. In other words, the revelation of Jesus Christ surpasses our obedience. Then we are no longer an overcomer. Nevertheless, this should give us hope.

People frequently ask me this question: “How can I be an overcomer? I am afraid I will never be an overcomer. Look at brother or sister so and so. I will never reach their status.” Be comforted. As much as the Lord has revealed Himself to you, and you have obeyed, you are an overcomer. On the other hand, do not be proud of yourself, because the Lord may give you more revelation which you have not obeyed; then you lose your crown.

In the recovery work of the testimony of Christ we find that because of the weakness of man, instead of all the members in the body of Christ responding to revelation, probably the majority will not respond to Christ. People love themselves too much, and they are so entangled with the things of this world. People are near-sighted; therefore, they may follow the Lord to a certain point and then stop. But God’s purpose does not fail because of the failure of man. He will raise up a few—those who respond to Him absolutely—and through these overcomers, God will accomplish His purpose. Overcomers do not overcome for themselves; they overcome for the whole body. They are the firstfruits, and they guarantee the harvest. So in this work of recovery, it follows upon that principle.

THE MANCHILD

Revelation 12 has been interpreted many different ways, but this is the way that the Lord seems to say to me. In this chapter, we find a woman in travail and the dragon waiting there before her. The dragon is not waiting there for the woman but for the manchild that is going to be born through that woman. Without going into details, we know that the manchild represents the overcomers, because when the manchild is born, he is immediately raptured to the throne where Christ is.

Satan’s headquarters is in the air, and this manchild is able to go through Satan’s headquarters and arrive at the throne. In other words, they are the overcomers. They overcome because of the blood of the Lamb. They are no different from other people.

They have their failures, but they know the preciousness of the blood of the Lord. And they overcome the accuser by the word of their testimony. They have the testimony of Jesus; therefore, when they speak, there is power. And they do not love their life even unto death. They are the people who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These are the overcomers who are being taken to the throne. I often say that they are the welcoming party of the Lord when He returns.

THE TWO STAGES OF THE LORD'S COMING

The Lord is coming again, but His coming or His parousia is in two stages. He will come from the throne to the air—unseen; then from the air to the Mount of Olives—seen by everybody. One of the stages of His coming is as a thief. When the thief comes, you do not know when it will be, but he comes to steal your treasure—not your garbage. The other coming of the Lord is as the lightning that shines from east to west. In the coming of the Lord from the throne to the air, it is unseen. It is from the air to the Mount of Olives that everybody sees. But after the manchild is raptured to the throne, Michael and his angels will fight with Satan and his angels, and Satan and his followers will be thrown from the air to the earth.

The air is cleared for our Lord Jesus to descend from the throne with the overcomers to the air. The trio of evil will be upon the earth and there will be the great tribulation. Even though there are different interpretations concerning the coming of the Lord, I think the facts seem to be clear. The overcomers represent God's heart for the church, and they will be taken because they are the treasure of the Lord's heart.

What if we do not overcome? What if we do not obey? Probably we will be left for the time of the great tribulation. The promise that was given to Philadelphia by the Lord was that when the time came, if they kept the word of His patience, they would no longer be here because they would be taken. But thank God, even though believers may go through the great tribulation, He gives them another opportunity. They can be overcomers through the great tribulation.

At the same time of the great tribulation is Jacob's trouble. The term great tribulation is for Christians; the term for the Jews is Jacob's trouble. Both the Christians who remain and the faithful Jews will go through great trouble. That is the discipline of the Lord. That is God's judgment in order to purify us, to complete us, that we too may be overcomers. Then when the Lord appears, everybody will see Him.

I often feel that the things we sing about the Lord's coming are based upon what the believers of the former centuries saw. They thought the whole church would be raptured before the great tribulation, and they were waiting for the trumpet to sound, for that great voice, and for the appearing of the Lord. But I feel that it is too late when this happens.

The Lord is coming, and He can come at any time. But when He comes in the first stage, you do not know it. People may be sleeping, and suddenly He comes and steals His treasure away. This is what we are waiting for. Do not think that there is more time. All the prophecies concerning His coming have been fulfilled. Of course, there are still prophecies that need to be fulfilled during and after His coming. But all the prophecies concerning the beginning of the coming of the Lord have been fulfilled. It can happen at any time. That is why this theme of recovering the testimony of Jesus is so urgent. Thank God.

THE NEW JERUSALEM

In Revelation 21 we find the great consolation—the testimony of Jesus Christ is fully realized, not only among the Christians but also among the Jews. The twelve gates or the twelve pearls have the names of the tribes of Israel, and the twelve precious stones of the foundation bear the names of the twelve apostles of the Lord. Everything that God has purposed in eternity past is now fully realized in eternity to come.

When we talk about the new Jerusalem, unfortunately, we are still thinking of ourselves. We think about what it will be when we walk on the golden street or walk by the river of life and drink of it. We will be surprised, because at that time, nobody will think of themselves. Everything in that city will be the manifestation of Christ. Nobody will think of themselves anymore. We will all be filled with Christ, and the testimony of Jesus will be fully realized in the everlasting kingdom. We are in the process, and by the grace of God, may we be those who are faithful to follow the Lamb wherever He goes. As He goes to the cross, we go to the cross, because the cross is the way to the throne. So may the Lord show mercy to us.

Let us pray.

Dear heavenly Father, we do praise and thank Thee because Thou hast shown us what is upon Thy heart. Thou dost want us not only to know the Lord Jesus but to be filled with Christ Jesus, that it will be all of Christ and none of self. We do pray, Lord, that our time together will not be in vain, that our hearts will be really touched by Thee so that the testimony of Christ will be our testimony, and Thy purpose may be fully realized in us. And it is all for Thy glory. We ask in the name of our dear Lord Jesus. Amen.