

# THE WAY OF RECOVERING THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS CHRIST

## KINGDOM

*Revelation 1:9—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.*

Let us pray:

*Dear Lord, as we gather together in Thy presence, it is the cry of our heart that Thou wilt come back. We thank thee, for Thou hast promised us that Thou wilt come quickly, and we are here waiting for Thee. Do prepare us so that when we see Thy face there will be no shame in us, that we may gladden Thy heart, knowing that by Thy grace we have followed Thee all the way. Do prepare us for Thyself. Even at this late hour, Lord, prepare us. Lead us, that we may follow Thee wheresoever Thou dost go. We commit this time into Thy loving hand. Speak Lord, Thy servants heareth. Do finish the work that Thou hast begun in us, that Thou mayst be glorified. We ask all of this in Thy precious name. Amen.*

Our purpose for this time is to learn the way of recovering the testimony of Jesus. We know that it is the will of God that the testimony of Jesus would be known throughout the whole world, and He has committed this to His church. We do regret that the church has failed again and again in that mission throughout church history. But thank God, even though man may fail, God never fails. He is always doing the work of recovering His testimony. We are now at the very end of the end, and we believe that it is the will of God that the recovery will be fully realized.

We will recall that at the first coming of our Lord Jesus, there were a few brothers and sisters who were truly waiting and preparing the way of the Lord's coming. Even though, outwardly, it seemed as if the whole Jewish nation was waiting for the coming of the Messiah, actually only a few were preparing for His coming. And we believe that at His second coming, this will be the same. God is looking for some who are ready and prepared for His coming. And who are those people? They are the ones who have the testimony of Jesus.

In Revelation 1:9, the apostle John said: "I, John, your brother and fellow-partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and patience, in Jesus, was in the island of Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus."

The reason why the apostle John was exiled to that island was because of the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus. How did he come to have the testimony of Jesus? We see from this word that he was in the tribulation and kingdom and patience in Jesus. Hence, we believe that these three things—tribulation, kingdom, and endurance—are the ways to the recovery of the testimony of Jesus.

Tribulation seems to be so negative, and yet God can use that negative means to accomplish the positive purpose. If we can see tribulation in the way God sees it, then we will be truly profited by it, and it will recover the testimony of Jesus to us.

## **THE THEME OF THE BIBLE IS THE KINGDOM**

Now we will take up the second point in the way to the recovery of the testimony of Jesus, which is the kingdom. In searching the word of God, we find that the kingdom of God or the kingdom of the heavens is the theme throughout.

In Colossians 1:13 it says, “Who (that is God) has delivered us from the authority of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love.” Formerly, we were in the kingdom of darkness. We were under the authority of the enemy of God. Even though we might not have been conscious of it, that is the fact. But thank God, He delivered us from the authority of darkness, and He has translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

Oftentimes, we think of being saved as our sins being forgiven and one day going to heaven. We do not realize that there is something far more that God has done at that time. Not only have our sins been forgiven, not only has He given us eternal life, but there is something greater that has happened. He has delivered us from the authority of darkness and has translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

We may use the history of the children of Israel as an example. They were slaves in Egypt where they were put under hard labor and not even allowed to live. All the male children must be thrown into the Nile River. They had no hope because they were under the iron rule of Pharaoh. They cried out to God, and God delivered them. We know that not only were they delivered from death by the Passover lamb, but also God had delivered them out of Egypt and translated them into His own kingdom. He brought them to Himself. What a deliverance that was!

## **OUR CITIZENSHIP IS IN HEAVEN**

As we come to the New Testament, we find that what was physically done to the children of Israel has happened to us spiritually. So far as our physical bodies are concerned, we are still in this world, but the world has not changed at all. It has become worse and worse and is still under the authority of darkness. People were just groping in darkness and did not know where they were going—even into eternal death. There was no hope and no God. That was our former situation. But thank God, He has delivered us out of the authority of darkness. We are no longer under the authority of Satan, the enemy of God. We belong to another kingdom—not the kingdom of this world. We belong to the kingdom of the Son of God, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of the heavens—that is where we are today.

So first of all, we need to understand that when we were saved, there was a great transference. We are no longer of the world, as our Lord Jesus said in John 17: “They are not of the world, as I am not of the world” (v. 16). Even though we are still in the world, we do not belong to it. We belong to the heavenly kingdom. Our citizenship is in heaven. We are under another authority—the Son of God’s love. In other words, all who are saved are now in the kingdom of the heavens. That is our position. That is what God has done with us.

## **REPENT FOR THE KINGDOM HAS DRAWN NIGH**

When John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Lord Jesus, came out to preach he said, “Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn nigh” (Matthew 3:2b). When the

Lord Jesus began His public ministry, He proclaimed the same message. He said, “Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn nigh” (Matthew 4:17b). Now we know that the children of Israel were suppose to be God’s people, and they were quite religious. At that time they had the temple, the five books of Moses, the prophets, the priests, and all these ceremonies. Outwardly, they appeared to be very religious, yet the message of God to them was “Repent.”

For four hundred years God had been silent, and suddenly, He began to speak. And His word to His people was “Repent. Do not think that you are going in the right direction. Everything is wrong, and you need to turn around.” Why did they need to repent? The kingdom of the heavens had drawn nigh.

And when our Lord Jesus began to preach, He spoke the same thing. He said, “Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn nigh.” The Lord Jesus is the King of the kingdom of heavens, and He came down from heaven to establish His kingdom upon this earth. But at that time He had no people, and a king, without a people, has no kingdom. So He had to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn nigh.” In other words, the King has come. The Lord Jesus was born as King but he had no people—He had no kingdom. So He had to tell His people to repent because the kingdom of the heavens had drawn nigh to them. If the people would repent and turn around, if they would believe in Him and put themselves under His kingship, then He would have His kingdom of heavens in this world. The Lord Jesus began His ministry with this message, and thank God, there were people who truly repented, turned around, and believed in Him. They not only believed in Him, but they followed Him.

### **THE CALL FOR DISCIPLES**

We recall that as the Lord Jesus was preaching, He began to call for disciples. This was the call to those who believed in Him to commit themselves to Him and put themselves under His kingship. This was for the purpose of making them sons of the kingdom—not only positionally but conditionally. So it is very, very important to see that there should be no distinction between believing and committing.

Today, we are aware that the gospel is preached in such a way that it has become a so-called “cheap gospel.” People are saying, “Just believe in Him and you are saved. You can go to heaven.” That’s it! But we forget that the gospel is a full gospel and salvation is a great salvation. God saved us not according to our need but according to His virtue and to His glory. He does not just want to save us out of hell into heaven. That may satisfy us but it will not satisfy God. This is out of His character. He wants to save us until He is satisfied. He wants to save us to the uttermost, that we may become sons of the kingdom. Therefore, these two things—believing in the Lord Jesus and submitting to the Lord Jesus—ought to be one. If you become a believer, you must be a disciple. There should be no division between believer and disciple.

Who are the disciples? We know that when the Lord called for disciples, He was walking on the seashore of Galilee. He saw two brothers there—Simon Peter and Andrew—and He called them: “Come and follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Immediately they left their boats and followed the Lord Jesus. He went a little further and saw the two sons of Zebedee, and He said: “Come and follow Me.” And they said goodbye to their father and the boat, and followed the Lord Jesus (see Mark 1:16-

20). This shows us that the call for disciples closely follows and should be together with the call to believe.

### **THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BELIEVING AND DISCIPLESHIP**

Now we would like to look at the difference between these two calls. To believe in the Lord Jesus is to receive grace from the Lord, but it is still me. In other words, it is Jesus for me. But to be a disciple is to surrender your life to Him, and He becomes the reason for your life. These two things should be together. How can we believe in Him, receive all His mercy and grace, and keep these all for ourselves? We ought to surrender our whole life to the One who loves us, washed our sins in His own blood, and has made us a kingdom (see Revelation 1:6). Therefore, all who believe in the Lord Jesus are, at the same time, called to be His disciples.

In the word of God we notice that the disciple is very different from the modern concept of student. Today, when you become a student, you have to pay some money to enter the school. There, you sit in the room and listen to your professors, trying to absorb all that they know. You are there just to learn. You are still independent, free and living your own life. But the disciple is different. He is like an apprentice in the olden days.

### **APPRENTICESHIP**

Probably, most of the young people do not know what an apprentice is. In the olden days it was the way of life. When a boy grew up, he would be apprenticed out to a master, and a contract would be signed. Then, suppose you wanted to be a carpenter. How would you go about learning carpentry? In the olden days, it was through the process of being an apprentice. You would choose a master carpenter, and after the contract was signed, you would leave your home to live with your master. You would become a part of his family; and usually during the first year, he would not even allow you to touch the instruments or the tools.

What would be your duties during the first year? You would help clean the house, hold the babies or serve at the table just like a servant. Now you may say, “Why did I come here? I came to learn a skill!” But that was the way of apprenticeship. There is a real meaning within it, because apprenticeship is more than learning a skill. It is to learn a life. Maybe after a year, the master would allow you to touch the tools and show you some of the secrets. When you have finished your apprenticeship, you have not only learned the skill of your master, you have learned his life. You will walk like him, you will talk like him. Everything will be like him. That is the wonder of apprenticeship—and this is discipleship. Those who believe in the Lord Jesus are all called to be His disciples because discipleship will make us sons of the kingdom.

### **CONSECRATION**

Maybe you have heard of this story of our dear brother Watchman Nee. When he was young, he was very gifted, and like most young men, he had his future planned out. Even though he was born into a Christian family, yet he was just nominal. He was in a Christian college, but he did not believe in the Lord Jesus. One day, he was greatly touched through his mother.

His mother was a very strong woman, and Brother Nee hated her because she treated him unjustly. I know because she treated me the same way. But when his mother got saved, she wanted to have a family devotion. So she called the family together and went to the piano to play a hymn. But the Spirit of God touched her and told her to go and confess to her son. She could not do it because in China this was not the custom. The parents are always considered as right. But the Spirit of God would not let her go, and finally she got up, went to her son, put her arms around him, and asked him to forgive her. That touched the heart of our brother very deeply.

As a result of this, when he was invited to hear Dr. Dora Yu, he said, “Anyone who can convert my mother is worthy of hearing.” So he went; and on the first night he was convicted. Not only did he know that he was a sinner, but he knew that the Lord Jesus is the only Savior in the world. However, he could not believe, and he struggled for days. Why was this so? He understood that if he believed in the Lord Jesus, he had to surrender his life to Jesus as his Lord. He could not do this because he had his own plan, his own ambition. After struggling over this for days, one evening he was in his room and he began to pray. He told us that he saw the blackness of his sins and the redness of the blood of the Lord Jesus. He was so constrained by the love of Christ that he fully surrendered himself.

Unfortunately, today, the gospel is so preached that it has become a cheap gospel. It tells the people they can get everything and even Christ surrounds them, making them the center of the universe. The nature of the gospel is misunderstood. It is not only the gospel of grace; it is also the gospel of the kingdom of the heavens. There are not two gospels—only one. Grace leads us to the kingdom, and the kingdom shows us what grace really is.

Do you realize that God has delivered you out of the power of darkness and has translated you into the kingdom of the Son of God’s love? Do you understand that He saves you and puts you into His own kingdom? Do you know that you are no longer your own and that you belong to Him?

Consecration is a must for all believers. If you have not presented your body a living sacrifice, you have not begun living the Christian life. Spiritual life begins with consecration. However, consecration is not giving yourself to the Lord to do something for Him. Consecration is putting yourself under the authority of your King and letting Him have all rights over your life. Don’t be afraid of that. Is it not better to put yourself in His hand than to hold it in your own hand? What can you do with yourself? But if you put yourself in His hand, He will transform you. He will form His character in you and make you fit for His kingdom.

### **THE NATURE OF GOD’S KINGDOM**

After the Lord called His disciples, He then began to reveal the nature of His kingdom, which is not the kingdom of the world. You recall how He testified before Pilate and said: “My kingdom is not of the world. It is a heavenly and spiritual kingdom” (see John 18:36). And the nature of His kingdom is taken from the King Himself. His kingdom is not eating and drinking but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (see Romans 14:17). His kingdom is what He is, and He wants to make us like Him. He wants to characterize us with His own character. That is His kingdom.

We read in John, chapter 6, that some of His disciples said, “This word is too hard,” and they left Him. Then the Lord Jesus said to the twelve: “Do you want to leave, too?”

You can go if you want to.” And thank God for Simon Peter who said: “Lord, You have the words of life, and we have followed You. Where can we go?”

Do you have this attitude? Are you thinking that His word is too hard, and you want to leave and not walk with Him anymore? Or are you thinking that you want to follow Him and wherever He goes, you will go, acknowledging Him as your King—your Sovereign?

### **THE VIOLENT TAKE THE KINGDOM**

As we come to Matthew, chapter 11, the Lord Jesus said, “The kingdom of the heavens is to be taken by violence, and the violent seize upon it” (see v. 12). The word *violent* seems to be too severe for us, so we try to make it gentler. But in the original, it is *violent*. However, the violence is not to be towards other people. On the contrary, it is to be towards ourselves. If we want to follow the Lord but are not violent with ourselves, we will not be able to follow on. We will be like the other disciples who said: “The word is too hard,” and we will cease to follow Him.

We need to be violent to ourselves, but this does not mean that we try to ill-treat ourselves. In the Middle Ages people really did violence to their bodies. They tried to be holy, and because they thought the body was evil they felt that they had to ill-treat it. So they beat themselves until blood came out, and they slept on a bed with nails. They tried all kinds of violence, thinking they could deliver themselves. Even the reformer Martin Luther did the same thing. He was a professor, but he left the professorship and went to an Augustinian monastery where he fasted and ill-treated himself until he almost died.

That is not what the Scripture is telling us. The violence is to deal with our soul-life because it is a fallen life. Our soul-life or our flesh is an ally of the enemy of God. It does not submit to God, and it does not know God. It is the enemy within us, and it is always resisting the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit strives with the flesh and the flesh strives with the Holy Spirit. That is the reason the Lord said: “Unless you deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Me, you cannot be My disciple. If you want to save your soul-life, you lose it. If you lose it for my sake and for the gospel’s sake, you save it to eternity” (see Mark 8:34-35). That is the word of God.

If we are to become disciples of the Lord Jesus, if we are to be disciplined to the kingdom, we will have to do violence to ourselves—we have to deny ourselves. Peter denied the wrong person. He should have denied himself. How often we deny the wrong person! We deny the Lord Jesus when we gratify our flesh; but if we do violence to ourselves, we will be able to seize the kingdom. In other words, we will not only be in the kingdom of God positionally, but conditionally we will be true sons of the kingdom. So we can see that the kingdom is the way to the recovery of the testimony of Jesus.

In the early church, we discover that all who believed in the Lord Jesus were disciples of the Lord Jesus, and it is the disciples who were first called Christians. Now if you were just a believer and not a disciple, the world could not see that you were truly a Christian and that you did not have the testimony of Jesus. But thank God, in the early church, they were all disciples; therefore they were all Christians. They had the testimony of Jesus.

### **DECLENSION IN THE CHURCH**

However, gradually, the church began to lose its first love, and the Lord used persecution and tribulation to restore them to the testimony of Jesus. As we come to the beginning of the fourth century, Constantine the Great adopted Christianity, and suddenly

it became a popular thing in the world to be a Christian. We know that the enemy tried to use persecution to kill the church, but God used that tribulation to restore the testimony of Jesus. As a result of this, the enemy changed his tactics and began to favor Christianity. Even Constantine, who was the emperor at that time, endorsed Christianity, and it suddenly became popular. He encouraged his soldiers to be baptized, telling them that they would be rewarded with clothes and silver. So of course, the soldiers wanted to be baptized because they would not only get something but they would also get the favor of the emperor. But declension came into the church. They mistook the kingdom of God as the kingdom of the world.

Most people in Christianity were unsaved, so how could they serve God? Therefore, they had to prepare a special group of people to do the ministry; and gradually, Christianity became a world empire. They thought that they were building the kingdom of God and did not know they had fallen into the trick of the enemy. Even justification by faith was lost, and people tried to accumulate merits in order to go to heaven. Christianity entered into a dark age, and the kingdom of the heavens was completely lost and became a worldly kingdom.

### **THE BEGINNING OF THE RECOVERY**

Thank God, in the sixteenth century, Martin Luther and other reformers began to preach justification by faith. They emphasized an open Bible and said: "Let's return to the word of God." This was the official beginning of the recovery of the testimony of Jesus. Unfortunately, they restored the gospel of grace, but they forgot the gospel of the kingdom; therefore, the kingdom truth was unknown among the Protestants. They said: "You just believe in the Lord Jesus and you are saved." Out of this came divisions in theology. Some people said, "Once saved, forever saved." Other people said, "After you are saved, if you do not behave, you will lose your salvation."

Christianity was divided into these two camps, and the controversy has continued even to this day. Why is it so? It is because the gospel of the kingdom of the heavens was lost, and salvation became cheap grace. The spiritual strength is not there for you to press on; and why should you do that anyway? After all, if you are saved you will go to heaven. Those who are loyal to the Lord, who deny themselves and follow the Lord, will fare the same way as those who eat and drink after they are saved. The truth of the kingdom of the heavens was lost.

### **THE KINGDOM LIFE FOR KINGDOM REIGN**

It was not until the nineteenth century that God began to raise up some of His servants to preach once again the kingdom of the heavens. These were people such as Pember, Govett, Panton, and others. They began to show us that those who have received the grace of God should not think that that is all there is, but there is something more. God wants us to be sons of His kingdom, and if we take up the character of the King today, then one day, we shall reign with Him. How can you reign with Him if you do not have His character?

So a kingdom life today will give us that kingdom reign in the days to come. It is true that if you believe in the Lord Jesus, you do have eternal life. It is the gift of God, and the gift of God knows no repentance. But before eternity comes, there will be a thousand years, a millennium age. This is what the Scriptures call the coming age. This age we are

now in is the age of grace; but when this age comes to a close, there will be the age of the millennium that the Scriptures talk about. And during those thousand years, the kingdom of the heavens will appear publicly on this earth. Today, it is hidden. Even though the reality is here, it is hidden. But one day it will appear. You will find this in Revelation 11:15: “The kingdom of the world of our Lord and of His Christ is come, and he shall reign to the ages of ages.” And those who are faithful to Him will reign with Him for a thousand years.

The Christians of today have become so loose because the kingdom truth has been lost to the church. There is not that force within them to press on towards the goal. Why should we do that anyway? Why not have the best of two worlds? Today, we can enjoy the world, and tomorrow we will be in heaven. Why should we be so foolish as to pay such a cost? Why should we carry the cross?

It is for the testimony of Jesus. Unless we live in the kingdom of the heavens today, we shall have no part in the kingdom when it becomes public upon this earth. Even though eternally we are saved, if we are not willing to receive the discipline of the Lord today, which enables us to grow up, we cannot be made sons of the kingdom. One day, when Christ shall come, He will reign over the earth, and those who follow Him will reign with Him. This is very clear in the word of God. Unfortunately, among God’s people, the kingdom of the heavens is still mostly unknown.

### **THE KINGDOM PREACHED IN ALL THE WORLD**

Then in Matthew 24:14 we discover this: “And these glad tidings of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole habitable earth, for a witness to all the nations, and then shall come the end.”

We are towards the end of this age, and our Lord is coming soon. But there is one thing needed—the kingdom of the heavens must be preached to all the nations, for a witness to the nations, and that is to be a testimony of Jesus. Hence, when that happens, the end will come.

We do believe that this is the time we should wake up. We should see that the kingdom of the heavens is part of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and it will prepare us for the coming of the Lord. We often sing gloriously in our meetings of the coming of Christ, but it will not come automatically. God’s timetable is according to His purpose. We may think, “Why is it that the Lord has not yet come?”

During the first century people were waiting for the coming of the Lord. Were they mistaken? No. During the great persecution, in the second and third centuries, people greeted each other with the word: “The Lord is coming!” But the Lord did not return, and now, twenty centuries have passed. We are in the twenty-first century, and the Lord still has not come; but we know His coming is very imminent.

Why has He not come? Surely, it is not because He does not want to come; but His bride is not ready. How can His bride be made ready? The gospel of the kingdom of the heavens is the preparation, and when it is preached to the whole habitable world as a witness to the nations, then the end will come. Thus, we are all responsible. We cannot just wait here passively. We have to be actively waiting in order to hasten His return (see II Peter 3:11-12). And those who hasten His return are those who have the kingdom life in them. So may the Lord help us.

*Dear Lord, Thy word has made it clear. Thou art calling us to follow Thee, that we may have the life of the kingdom of the heavens, that we may be those who have the testimony of Jesus, that this would hasten Thy return. Make us those who are among the rank. We look to Thy mercy. We ask in Thy name. Amen.*