

WCCC July 29, 2010

The Right Course to Finish: The Person Running the Way (2)

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I will continue to fellowship with brothers and sisters about finishing the course. Last night we already fellowshiped that the Apostle Paul told us that in order for us to finish the ministry we received from the Lord, to be the testimony of Jesus Christ, we need to run in the course the Lord has set for us. Paul used his own experiences to encourage God's children. In Paul's own feeling, to finish the course is the same thing as finishing the ministry he received from the Lord. So today as we testify for our Lord, the first thing we need to pay attention to is whether or not we are running in the course the Lord wants us to run in. Yesterday we had mentioned that if we are running in the wrong way, then the testimony will be lost. Of course today if we want to run in the right path, the first thing is that we need to be clear about the goal. The only way that can reach the goal is the right way. This is a very important thing for all the churches and all the saints. The Bible tells us that not only do we need to run in the right way, we need to run well. To run right concerns our understanding; if we understand God's eternal purpose, then we have a set goal and know the right way. This is a question of our understanding. However, in order to run it well has to do with the person. If we want to run in this way well, our personal condition before the Lord must be well. Tonight we will fellowship with brothers and sisters the person running the way.

Exodus 25:10-15

*They shall construct an ark of acacia wood two and a half cubits long, and one and half cubits wide, and one and a half cubits high. You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it, and you shall make a gold molding around it. You shall cast four gold rings for it and fasten them on its four feet, and two rings shall be on one side of it and two rings on the other side of it. You shall make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. You shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, to carry the ark with them. The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be removed from it.*

Joshua 3:1-3

*Then Joshua rose early in the morning; and he and all the sons of Israel set out from Shittim and came to the Jordan, and they lodged there before they crossed. At the end of three days the officers went through the midst of the camp; and they commanded the people, saying, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God with the Levitical priests carrying it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it."*

Acts 1:8

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.*

Acts 9:1-2

*Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and woman, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.*

Acts 26:16,19

*“But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you.” ... “So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision.”*

Galatians 2:1-2

*Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. It was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain.*

1 Thessalonians 3:7-9

*For this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith; for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord. For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account.*

Job 31:4-8

*Does He not see my ways and number all my steps? If I have walked with falsehood, and my foot has hastened after deceit, let Him weigh me with accurate scales, and let God know my integrity. If my step has turned from the way, or my heart followed my eyes, or if any spot has stuck to my hands, let me sow and another eat, and let my crops be uprooted.*

### ***The Testimony Entrusted to Man***

From the Bible we can clearly see that God chose man to be the witnesses of Jesus Christ. It means that the testimony of Jesus is entrusted to man. As a matter of fact it says that wherever there is a man, there is a testimony. From Church history we can also see that the testimony of Jesus is passed on from generation to generation through man. It was true in the Old Testament and true also in the New Testament, because it is God's heart to gain man, to work in man so that His testimony can be manifested and passed on through man. If we carefully read the Bible, we can see that God never entrusted His testimony to an organization or some work. In the Old Testament time, God chose the people of Israel to be His witness. In the New Testament, God uses the Church to testify of Him. So what is Church? For all brothers and sisters here, we are clear that Church is not a building, not an organization, but composed of all God's people saved by grace. It is very clear that the testimony is entrusted to us who are saved by grace.

### ***The Ark as an Illustration of the Testimony***

Exodus in the Old Testament gives us a very clear picture that can explain this. As the Israelites were led out of Egypt and came to Mt. Sinai, the Lord revealed the pattern of the tabernacle to Moses. They built the tabernacle according to the pattern revealed on the mountain. Among all the articles, one of the most important was the ark. We know that the ark is the most important type or illustration in the Old Testament, for it is also called the ark of the testimony, that is the testimony of Jesus. We know there are many articles in the tabernacle, and as the Israelites were

moving, some items can be placed on carts. However, some sacred articles must be carried by priests. Especially when the ark is mentioned, God's commandment is that it must be carried upon the shoulders of the priests. As the people of Israel were living in the wilderness, we can say that the priests were running the heavenly way while carrying the ark upon their shoulders. Although only a few were carrying the ark, it was only a type described in the Old Testament. These few actually represent all the Israelites. When the tabernacle was built, the ark was the center of the tabernacle and the tabernacle was the center for the people of Israel. We can clearly see that God has entrusted His testimony to the entire people of Israel. The ark was to be placed on the shoulders and carried by the priests. Although it was only a few people, we don't know exactly how many. The Bible does not tell us how many priests carry the ark. I believe there is a meaning to this as well, that is to say the ark is to be placed on the shoulders of all the Israelites. Yet the few people represent a very important principle, that is the testimony of Jesus is entrusted to a corporate body. The ark cannot be carried by one person. God has clearly revealed His heart that He wants to use a corporate body to manifest His testimony. In the Old Testament time these few people were a representation. I think when these priests were chosen to carry the ark, I believe their hearts were full of joy and filled with glory. It was such glory to carry the ark for the Lord.

### ***Carrying the Ark: Principle of the Body***

The construction of the ark is very special. There are two cherubims made of pure gold and a mercy seat made of pure gold. There were golden moldings and acacia wood overlaid with gold. We know that the ark is very heavy, and the way of carrying it was very special. The Bible tells us that the rings which carry the ark were at the feet, the bottom of the ark. Two poles were to go through the rings. Now we see this picture: in order to pick up the ark, it was heavier on the top. This method is not very stable, so many people who draw the ark usually draw the rings toward the middle of the ark. They feel that if it is carried in this way it will be more stable, but this is not in accordance to God's command. He says that the rings must be at the feet. We can imagine that the priests who carry the ark most likely had to go through some training so that the few could carry it together. Why God had designed it this way gives us some principles that we can apply to our church life today. I believe when the priests picked up the ark, they were very cautious. The ark was the most sacred article in the tabernacle, it represented God Himself. As they carried the ark, you can imagine that they put their entire attention towards the ark and would not think of anything else. Brothers and sisters, God uses this to tell us that if today we want to carry the testimony, all of our attention must be on this matter. You cannot think about anything else while carrying the ark. They may have been even holding their breaths while carrying the ark. You cannot do this casually chattering and talking while picking up the ark. They put all of their attention to this as it is such a sacred matter. It tells us that it is no small matter for us to carry the testimony. We may be relaxed about many matters, but we must be serious when it comes to the testimony. Because there were a few priests, they all had to be of one heart, caring and helping one another. We can see this principle in 1 Corinthians 12 as we need this for our church life. We know that as they were walking in the wilderness, there were no level roads. The ground was bumpy, so these people carrying the ark had to help one another, and learn to lay down themselves. Whenever I think about the priests carrying the ark of the Lord, I feel a sense of seriousness concerning God's people working together in the Church. No wonder those who truly love the Lord, those who truly understand the entrustment of God will not speak casually in their lives, and are even more serious in their service. Their entire being is

given to the Lord. You can imagine those few who are carrying the ark, if among them there is one who is emotionally unstable and begins to feel angry, the ark will topple. We can see that this is the difficulty we have in our Church life. We pray the Lord will give us this seeing as the Lord has given us this entrustment. As we face this matter, we need to know how to co-work with our brothers and sisters. From the Bible we see that God truly values the principle of a corporate body.

### ***God's Desire: a Corporate Body***

When we read Genesis, we see individual testimonies of the forefathers and we know that God did have His will during that period of time. These individual testimonies tell us that we must have our own individual relationship with the Lord. Although God had gained some people to have very intimate and precious relationships with Himself, but His heart was not satisfied. From Abraham God revealed His heart that He wanted to gain a corporate body. From the Old Testament, God gained the people of Israel. Oftentimes in our church life, it is hard for us to distinguish the difference between individuals and the corporate body. In the Bible we see recordings of personal events of individuals who were spiritual giants, so these recordings may be a great influence on many people. We then care only about our own personal development before the Lord. Yet as we look at God's original purpose, He wants to gain a corporate body. There is a small, yet important principle we need to keep. Each individual is for the corporate body, and the corporate body is to perfect each individual. As a matter of fact, the individual and the corporate body are inseparable. In the New Testament time, God tells us that the Church is His body. Every member of the body cannot exist alone. This thought was already in God's heart from the foundation of creation. But because man fell, this hindered the revealing of God's thought. Our God has unlimited patience. From the creation of man until 1,500 years later, God gained the people of Israel. He led them out of Egypt, came to Mt. Sinai and entrusted the ark to Israel. When the tabernacle was built, a cloud covered the entire structure. The tabernacle was filled with glory. What does this represent? This says that God's eternal purpose was finally manifested, even though this manifestation was merely a type, yet God's heart was filled with joy. Brothers and sisters, if we truly love God, we need to be mindful of His heart. We know that His heart has never changed. God wants to gain man to be His witnesses. In the Old Testament time, the ark has to be carried by man.

### ***Caring for the Testimony: Obey His Commandments***

For this matter, there is another story recorded in the Bible which is a great warning for us. This story happened to David. God used a person who loved the Lord to warn us. This was not a mistake made by those who do not love the Lord. Yesterday we mentioned the example of Abraham. Abraham loved the Lord and David was one who loved the Lord during the Old Testament time. However, great mistakes happened to these people who loved the Lord. These are very serious warnings to us. When David became king of Israel, his first desire was to bring back the ark. Psalm 132:6 says, *Behold, we heard of it [the ark] in Ephrathah, we found it in the field of Jaar.* Ephrathah was David's hometown. This tells us that in his youth, David cared much about God's ark. We truly desire that God can gain more Davids among the young people, and from our youth we will care about God's testimony. When David became king of Israel, we thank the Lord, his heart cared about God's ark. Later we see many kings of Israel, when they became king they only cared about themselves. It was different, however, with David. David knew that God loved him, and God gave him the opportunity to be the king of Israel. He used all

the opportunities God gave him for God, Himself. How many people have this condition? Oftentimes we ask for blessings and after God blesses us we forget Him. David never forgot God, so when he became king, the first thing he did was to look for the ark. Later, he found out that the ark was at the house of Abinadab, and he joyfully came to retrieve the ark. The method he used was to place the ark upon a new cart. They forgot God's commandments. We know that David loved the Lord, and his intentions and motives were good. Yet God did not allow for this mistake. As the ark upon the cart came to the threshing floor of Nacon, the oxen nearly upset it so that it was about to topple, so Uzzah reached out to steady the ark. God killed Uzzah right there. 2 Samuel 6 says that God struck him down for this mistake.

Brothers and sisters, this is such an important reminder. Many brothers and sisters love the Lord and in our service perhaps we do things for the Lord even with good intentions and motives, but if you are against the will of God, your kind intentions cannot be accepted. Remember John 14:21 where it says, "*He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.*" God does not care that much about our intentions and motives, whether or not it is good. This is the greatest definition for those who love the Lord. Who are those who love the Lord? Those who have His commandments and keep them are those who love the Lord. As we serve the Lord today we see many who have good intentions and motives. We may accept it, but it may not be accepted by God. This is a very important reminder. We may think then, why did David forget God's commandment? Uzzah was a priest and he also forgot the commandments of God. After the Israelites came into Canaan they placed the ark at Shiloh, and then after the generation of Joshua another 450 years of Judges passed, and then the reign of Saul was for 40 years. The total period of time that had passed was over 500 years. It is possible that because of the length of time, the Israelites forgot God's commandments. They might have forgotten that the ark had to be carried. David made a great mistake by placing the ark on an ox cart. So when he saw that Uzzah was struck by God, he was afraid. Brothers and sisters, time may change, man may change, but God's will will never change. We cannot say that because 21 centuries have passed, we can change some things. No matter how time changes, God's will has never changed. In our service, even if our intentions and motives are good, they cannot replace the will of God and we cannot use our intentions to be against the will of God. Brothers and sisters, the ark must be placed upon the shoulders of priests. David then put the ark at the house of Obed-edom for three months. God greatly blessed that household. For some reason, God encouraged David so that he knew it was not that God rejected David, but his method was wrong. He came to realize that the ark had to be carried by priests. Thank the Lord, David is a person who truly loves the Lord. His spirit was soft and was willing to be corrected by God. He knew that he was wrong, so this time he used priests to carry the ark. The Bible uses this story to warn us. In God's will, man can only be obedient. We have to trust and obey all the Words in the Bible. We can never change God's Words through our environment or our experiences. We have to believe before God that He will never be wrong. We have to closely follow His commandments, and in this way we will be people who truly love the Lord.

### ***The Corporate Body, the Church Entrusted with the Testimony of Christ***

In the Old Testament we see that God entrusted His testimony to man and a corporate body. This revelation becomes even more clear in the New Testament. The testimony of Christ has been entrusted to the Church, so when we mention Church we have a very strong understanding within us. This is the only corporate body that He has entrusted His testimony to; besides the

Church, no other group can take up this testimony. The greatest ministry we can have is the building of the Church. The Church was being built up starting from the book of Acts and in Ephesians we see that Paul revealed the meaning of the Church so clearly. When we come to Revelation, God gives us the condition of the seven churches of Asia Minor. It all tells us that God has a very strong demand that He wants to gain the corporate body for His testimony. Even though we have many difficulties in our lives today and we may feel frustrated or disappointed; no matter how frustrated or disappointed, we must remember that the testimony of Christ is entrusted to the Church. No matter how difficult, we move forward according to God's grace. Even in our service if we cannot build our gathering to perfection, our desire will be acceptable to God. We cannot change our direction just because we see the chaotic condition of the Church today. If we are in such a condition, then God's desire will fail, it will be such a tragedy and we will suffer loss.

### ***The Church is For His Testimony: Be a Witness***

There is much abnormalities in today's Christianity. I personally have much regret as we see so much activities, events, organizations in today's Christianity. People have such great fervency for activities, programs and organizations more than the Church. It is a very prevalent condition as many have great interest in activities outside of the Church, while neglecting the building of the Church. There are some who would even like to drag the Church in to support their work. This is a grave mistake. I often would receive these phone calls: "Brother, can you give me the opportunity to come to your assembly to introduce our work?" That means he would like to have the support of the Church for his work. I would like to say again, this organization or work, while their motives and intentions may be good, but God's heart is on the Church. Brothers and sisters, this is not because of any background, this is a revelation from the Bible, it is God's heart. May the Lord allow us to understand this. Time has come to the end, and the heart of our Lord is so urgent, His eyes are continually on the Church on earth searching whether or not there is a group of people who are serving according to His will, whether or not He can find a resting place. Today whether or not we can please the Lord, for us to receive His return, we must live Church life that is according to His will. I believe that this is an important calling of God to His Church during the end times. God wants to gain the Church to carry His testimony. We can put it this way, the testimony of the Church for the Lord is a corporate manifestation of witnesses. It means that everyone is a witness. This is very important, God is not calling a few to be witnesses, He is calling everyone to be a witness for Him. So whether the testimony of a local assembly is strong or not all depends on how many witnesses are in that assembly. If in this assembly everyone is a witness, then the testimony will be strong. If there are only a few who understand the testimony and a few who are being the witness for the Lord, then the Church's condition must be very weak. If we see clearly the condition of the seven churches in Asia Minor, we will be clear about this principle.

### ***Principle of the Body: Individual For the Body***

Brothers and sisters, as we have been saved by grace and He has placed us in His body, we need to have a strong sense of the body. The Apostles in the first century who were running in the way of the Lord, not only did they have a very good personal condition before the Lord, but there was also another important point. For those who truly know the Lord, they were running under the principle of the corporate body. Today as we are running in the way of the Lord, we need to run in the principle of the body, and we need to have an understanding of the body of Christ. We

need to strive to live the body life. In our service, we need to be restrained by the body, meaning that we do not run our own way. We do not try to build up our own personal career and we cannot use the Church. We see the Church condition now, and we pray that He deliver us from many mistakes. We need to build up the Church with all our brothers and sisters. We may ask, doesn't Revelation say that we need to be overcomers? Many say that the overcomer in the original text is singular, speaking of individuals. But we cannot forget, God is calling for overcomers from various churches. The usage is very clear, we need to pursue after personal overcoming for the sake of the body, that is for the Church. Why is that? Because the testimony is Jesus is entrusted to the Church. In the early churches the Apostles had a strong understanding of this. In 1 Thessalonians 3:8, we just read that Paul was one who possessed great gifts and was zealous in serving the Lord. He was very motivated, but he constantly lived in the principle of the body. He said to the brothers and sisters in Thessalonica, *for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord*. What does this mean? It means that Paul lives under the principle of the body. Paul connected his entire fate into the body. If the Church is not standing firm, with even more of his own personal success, he would not be able to continue to live. Brothers and sisters, we truly need the grace of the Lord. Just like Caleb, and the reason why Caleb could take over Hebron. He was a mighty warrior, and here we can understand easily that if the entire household of Israel had entered into Canaan, how could Caleb not take his family in to take over Hebron? We can see that he was standing on the principle of the body to live an overcoming life.

#### ***To Be a Witness: Have Vision of the Testimony***

The Church is composed of witnesses. Today God is making every brother and sister into a witness. Not only has He called us to be His witnesses, He is making us into witnesses. Of course God's work begins from the individual. Interestingly, the fruit of God's work which begins in us personally spreads to the entire body. From the life of Paul we can see how God made him into a witness. I will briefly fellowship with brothers and sisters some points. In order to be a witness of Christ, from Paul's life we see that we need to have vision and be governed by vision. All who run in the heavenly way need to have vision. It was this way for the Old Testament prophets and for the Apostles in the New Testament. They could be successful because they were governed by vision. They were directed by God's revelation. Peter is an example in Acts. Peter was directed by God's revelation. When his condition was at its apex, Acts 9 shows us that even his shadow allowed those who were sick to be healed. He resurrected Dorcas from the dead. Peter must have been very mature then, but in Acts 10 when God wanted to take him to the home of a Gentile, God still needed to direct his steps by a vision. Because of that vision, he went to the home of Cornelius. It was the same for Paul. Paul said that after 14 years he went to Jerusalem because of a revelation. We see that while running the heavenly way, they were directed by God's revelation. Paul says in Acts 26:19, *So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision*. We know that this is the mercy of God because in his last return to Jerusalem he almost failed. Paul's desire was right, but circumstances were very difficult. We thank the Lord, God's hand upheld him so that he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. Brothers and sisters, before the Lord's return we will go through many tests in our circumstances. Can we withstand these tests? It depends on whether our life and service is governed by the vision of the Lord. For us, the most influential vision is the testimony of Jesus.

#### ***To Be a Witness: Strong Spirit/Inner Man***

The second point is that their inner man must be strong. Paul prayed in Ephesians 3 that their inner man might be made strong. That means that the condition of the spirit must be strong. The condition of the spirit must be good. We know that if the condition of a Christian's spirit is weak, then the testimony will be weak. Why Paul wrote letters to Timothy was for a very important reason; it was because at that time the condition of Timothy's spirit was weak. So Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:7, *For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.* In his last greetings he said, *The Lord be with your spirit.* Paul knew that if Timothy's spirit was weak, the testimony would be damaged. How can our spirit be strong? We need to be strengthened by the Holy Spirit in our spirit. We need to live a life filled with the Holy Spirit. If our spirit is strong, then we will be full of faith. The indwelling of Christ will be evident. In 2 Corinthians 4 Paul says *that our inner man is being renewed day by day.* Our spirit will continue to grow and become stronger and stronger. If a person's spirit condition is strong, there will be some signs. They will care care for the things which are eternal and not seen. If our eyes are still on things that we can see, it proves that our inner man is still weak. Our inner man needs to be strong.

### ***To Be a Witness: Basic Christian Experiences***

The third point is that in 1 and 2 Timothy, Paul mentions some basic experiences for Christians. We cannot look lightly at these matters, they are very important. As Christians, we need to have clear consciences, sincere faith, good consciences, a mind willing to suffer hardship, cleansing ourselves so that we can flee from base desires. Paul had many important reminders for Timothy, and lastly tells him that he needs to hold fast to eternal life, meaning the need to live in the feeling of life. Follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in the sense of life. Christians need to live a life that is an outflowing fountain. Our spirit needs to be vibrant, fresh and full of power. We need to be full of light. Paul says we need to hold fast, meaning that we cannot relax. We can see that these are much encouragements from the epistles and also tells us of the experiences we need in order to become witnesses of the Lord. We thank our Lord.

### ***To Be a Witness: Have a Strong Desire***

Lastly, we want to use the words from the book of Job as an encouragement to run in this way. These are very good words spoken by Job. *Does He not see my ways and number all my steps?* He knows that God is not looking at us casually, God is numbering every step we take. Job was reminded and mentions six times: *"If my/if I."* *If I have walked with falsehood, if my foot has hastened after deceit.* The next statement is actually enclosed in parenthesis, *(Let Him weigh me with accurate scales, and let God know my integrity.)* He says, *If my step has turned from the way, or my heart followed my eyes, or if any spot has stuck to my hands, then...* this is a strong desire, *Let me sow and another eat,* which is let me work in vain. *Let my crops be uprooted,* which is for all my possessions to be taken away. This is Job's strong desire. Brothers and sisters, for we who are running in the heavenly way, may we also have this desire. Perhaps after hearing my message tonight you feel that this generation is too difficult, who can do it? We thank the Lord, Paul also said that while we cannot, God can. May we truly have a heart for the Lord. We place our desire before God. It is the work of the Holy Spirit for us to be witnesses for the Lord. Before the ascension of the Lord, He said to His disciples that they needed to wait and receive power from above, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and then you will have power and be witnesses on the earth.

Brothers and sisters, we see that God's will has been entrusted to us. Those who truly testified of the Lord in the first century were called people of the Way. Oftentimes because of their personal love for the Lord, they moved the entire Church toward the Lord. Because the entire Church turned toward God, it made the testimony strong. Today our path needs to be right and we need to run it well. In order to run it well, we need to pay much attention to ourselves as a person. I believe the Spirit of the Lord is moving among us and He is right now working in us. May through the Word we have received from Him, we return to be more obedient to Him, to yield more of ourselves to the Holy Spirit so that we can be made into witnesses. We want to run well in this course so that His testimony can be recovered from its lost condition. Let us bow and pray.

*Lord we thank You with all our hearts. Even though we are weak people, You have chosen us to be Your witnesses. Throughout generations You have chosen weak people to be Your witnesses. How they were able to testify well for You in their generation was not because of their own power, but because they knew how to rely upon You, and they knew how to be obedient to Your leading. They were willing to keep Your commandments. Lord as we are here, we are also willing to place ourselves into Your hands. May You do Your work according to Your desire so that each one of us can be Your witness, so that Your testimony can be strong in every church, so that the testimony of Jesus can be manifested. May You fulfill Your own purpose. We worship You from the depths of our hearts, listen to our prayer. In Jesus' most precious Name we pray, amen.*