

A TALE OF TAKING UP THE TORCH OF THE TESTIMONY

Lord, as we come to You, what really counts, what really matters is what is on Your heart, and we want to enter into that. Lord, we want to be a part of sharing Your heart and being responsible in carrying out Your will. We ask for special grace tonight. We are tired but You are the One who can quicken our bodies to the work of the Holy Spirit. Quicken our spirits, quicken our souls, quicken our entire being that we may be alive to the Holy Spirit. Lord, awaken us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Isaiah 21:11—The burden of Dumah. He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? What of the night?

Mark 6:45-51—And straightway he (Jesus) constrained His disciples to get into the ship and go to the other side unto Bethsaida, while he sent away the people. And when he had sent them away, he departed unto the mountain to pray. And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he was alone on the land. And he saw them toiling and rowing in the wind, and the wind was contrary to them, and about the fourth watch of the night he came to them walking upon the sea; and would have passed them by: but when they saw him walking on the sea, they supposed it to be a spirit and cried out; for all who saw him were troubled and immediately he talked with them and said, 'Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.' And he went into the ship and the wind ceased and they were amazed beyond measure and wondered.

The Fourth Watch

The theme for this conference is the passing of the torch of the testimony. We believe this is the word of the hour in which we live. This story that we see recorded is really a prophetic word of the hour in which we live. It was the fourth watch of the night, the darkest part of the night before the sun rose. The fourth watch is from 3 AM – 6 AM. It is the darkest hour before the day dawns. Is this not prophetic of the hour in which we live? Is it not a dark night? Is it not getting darker? The book of Revelation shows us what lies ahead in the fourth watch. It is the darkest hour because of the resistance of the adversary to the Lord's testimony on this earth. There is great resistance and the hour is dark. But praise the Lord, the day is about to dawn. The Lord is about to come and that is what we look forward to, but we find for us the wind is contrary.

We find ourselves rowing against the wind. It is difficult to stand for the testimony of Jesus in this hour, for there is much resistance to His testimony, particularly His corporate testimony in the body of Jesus Christ.

We find the disciples were rowing with all of their might. They were tired and exhausted, and probably they were to the point of giving up; then the Lord appeared. Is this not true in the hour in which we live right before the Lord comes? We are tired; we have been sharing in the Lord's testimony all of these years carrying that torch. He has shown us His eternal purpose. That purpose grabbed my heart many years ago, as it did many of you that are here. He gave us revelation of His heart counsels. He gave us revelation that we are not just individuals trying to share the testimony of Jesus, but we are part of the body of Christ to be the testimony of Jesus. We are to be the fullness of the testimony of Jesus that the torch will burn brightly and be strong.

He has shown us His great desire to have a house to dwell in in the midst of His people. That has been His heart. He has been showing us these things all of these years.

Standing for God's Full Purpose

He has a desire for His church to be His army. In Ephesians 6 it tells us that the church is to be a warrior which will stand on this earth for His will to be done, to stand in prayer, and having done all to stand. And hasn't He shown you His great desire for His bride? How He longs and yearns for His bride to be ready, to be His companion throughout eternity and to share in all God has in store for those days which are ahead. He has captured many of you to serve Him and His purpose down through these years, but the hour is getting darker. The resistance is getting more intense. There have been many battles through the years to maintain the testimony of Jesus and to carry that torch. It has been difficult; the wind has been contrary. What are we going to do? What are we able to do? We must keep on rowing. We must not stop rowing. Those disciples continued to row even though they were weary and tired; and they rowed until the Lord showed up.

We need to keep on rowing until the Lord shows up. Look off onto Jesus, the Author and Finisher not only of our faith, but the Author and Finisher of His will and purpose. We need to look off onto Him and not look at our tired condition. Praise the Lord, we have the Victor, we have the triumphant One, we have the King of glory. He is our encouragement, and we are encouraged to look off unto Him. And we must encourage one another in this hour. It says that we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, but to come together and encourage one another, particularly as the day draws near. Keep on rowing until the day dawns, until the Lord appears. That is our challenge.

The King is Coming

And this week, I hope we will be encouraged to keep on rowing. The Lord encourages us. He said, "During these days in the fourth watch, look up for Your redemption draws nigh." I am glad we sang that song "The King is coming." Indeed He is! His return is imminent! We are in the fourth watch. It is certainly way past 3 AM, the beginning of the fourth watch which began when the Lord came to this earth the first time. In fact, I dare say we are past the four o'clock mark, past the five o'clock mark; I think maybe we are approaching very close to the six AM mark, five:fifty-five, maybe five:fifty-nine. But no matter how close it may be, He will not return until we are ready. That is the delay. That is the reason for these two thousand years of delay. His people are not ready. He is looking for those who will stand fast for Him and that He can look upon and say, "Yes, I need to come back. I am being drawn back." He needs us to be ready. He is coming soon. I anticipate that He will come back in my lifetime. I am seventy-two. It tells you that there are not many more years. But I can tell you with all the sincerity of this heart, our brother Stephen, who is one hundred and one years old, is still looking for the Lord to return in his lifetime. So we think it is very near, but we also know that He may be delayed even longer; we do not know. It is dependent on our response to making ourselves ready for Him.

For us older ones, we have to keep on rowing. But if He does not return in our lifetime, it is important and necessary that the torch of testimony be passed on to the next generation, and

that is the burden for this conference. We have to keep on rowing. We cannot give up. It is important for the younger generation to grab hold of those oars as well and start rowing. The burden this year is for the younger generation to begin to row and take up the torch of testimony. Actually this conference is not intended to teach us anything, but it is for us to take up the Lord's burden for this hour that He would raise up the next generation to carry on, and that we would not give up, but we would continue to be responsible to see that they do come along. So that is our heart.

The Burden for the Younger Generation

I think it might be good to give you a little history of this burden to help us get a better sense of what we think is on the Lord's heart. Actually it began in September of 2015 when our brother Stephen became very burdened for the younger generation, and he shared three messages on the second generation—the lives of Timothy, Titus, and Epaphras. You probably recognize these young men. They were young men that Paul brought to the Lord, and they were mentored by him to take up that torch of testimony. They all had different temperaments. Timothy was a very timid young man. Titus on the other hand was very bold. Epaphras was a man of great compassion and was always trying to encourage the saints, and a man of prayer. They all had different temperaments but the Lord raised them up to take up the torch of testimony and to serve the assemblies. Although they had different temperaments, what they had in common was that they had given their lives to the Lord to serve Him in their generation. It was said of David that he served the Lord in his generation, and these young men were also raised up to take up the torch of testimony.

The Burden for the Conference

This was the burden that came and we began to pray about it before the Lord as we gathered on Wednesday nights. We prayed consistently concerning this burden of the next generation. At the same time we were beginning to prepare for the conference and trying to discern what the Lord wanted. Actually at that time, we were not even sure we were to have another conference. You may think we take it for granted we will, but we do not; and we were not sure. We were very unsure as a matter of fact, but as we continued to pray, we received two letters from younger brothers in other assemblies, and they were very burdened about the hour in which we live and that we needed to be ready. They encouraged us that we should continue with the conference this year. It was from their encouragement that we said, "Lord, maybe this is Your heart." We began to sense that this was the Lord's heart for another conference, that He has something to say to His people. And we began to ask the Lord: "Okay Lord, we sense You want us to continue this year, but what is really on Your heart?"

As we continued to pray about this burden of the next generation, a young sister in the assembly in Richmond shared this thought with us that the Lord had given her, and it became the catalyst to really confirm what was on the Lord's heart. Let me read it to you. It was sent to us in an email.

“Ever since this topic came up about the young people and the baton or the testimony being passed to the next generation, I kept thinking back to the days when I ran track. I was in the 4x100 relay for all the years in high school, and the thing we practiced repeatedly was the baton handoff. In longer distant runs the handoff is not such a big deal, but in the 4x100 it is pretty much the race. If the handoff is poor, the race is pretty much lost. But for the handoff to be successful, the person receiving the baton has to reach full speed before the one passing the baton slows down. They basically both have to be running at full speed. Otherwise something is lost. The transfer can still be made but time has been lost in the race. Oftentimes the transfer gets messy or the baton gets dropped, and sometimes you run out of time and are disqualified because you can only make the handoff between a set distance on the track.

The Young and Old Together

I guess the thing that struck me in all of this is that we need everyone, young or old, giver or receiver, we cannot slow down. The young ones may still be running to reach their peak speed, but as they run they need the older ones to keep running at full speed and cheer them on as they come from behind. Go, go, go, until the time is just right. They accelerate together and the baton can be handed forward and they can take off. We need everyone. We cannot do the handoff unless everyone is running at peak speed. May the Lord have His way to all of us in our midst.”

We prayed. We took that as a real word from the Lord about passing the torch of testimony. We had a family meeting concerning the Lord’s burden. During that meeting, another young sister had something to say that sealed it. Let me read what she said.

“It has been amazing that Stephen, through his messages on Timothy, Titus, and Epaphras and how Paul mentored them, showed us what is so deeply on the Lord’s heart. It has been amazing as we have been praying about this that the Lord is bringing this burden to birth, and He wants us to be faithful in praying and doing our part to bring it to birth.”

I think that seals it. Then we met with the representatives of other assemblies who sponsor this conference. We came away with one mind and in one heart that this is indeed the burden of the Lord. So we wanted to share that with everyone. I do think this is the burden for the hour in which we live. We older ones have to keep on rowing, and the younger ones are going to have to take it up.

I well remember when I took up the torch in my life, and I thought it would be helpful to share with you concerning this burden.

Personal Testimony

The Lord touched my heart as a child. I was twelve years old, and He convicted me of sin. I was lying and had been caught a number of times doing this and He convicted me. My mother came to me and one of the wisest things she ever said was this: “Son, I am upset with you but I am not your problem. You need to get straight with the Lord, then you can get straight with me.” That really struck me. She left, and I got on my knees and was crying and asking the Lord for forgiveness. The Lord met me right there at twelve years old. I knew it was the Lord. He forgave me. I was not brought up in the church. I went to 17 different schools through high school. We never went to church that much, but my mother was a Methodist. She knew at twelve years old

something needed to happen with me, so she encouraged me before the Lord. I did not know I was saved but I knew I had met the Lord. I knew He had forgiven me. I knew there was something different even though I did not have the terminology to explain it.

I went along until I was at the age of seventeen, and the Lord brought a wonderful woman into my life. She was my future mother-in-law. I ended up marrying my high school sweetheart, but I used to go to her house and spend time sharing with her mother. She loved the Lord and shared Him with me. We enjoyed sharing the Lord together; she was such a living person in the Lord. She showed me that I needed to be a disciple of the Lord. It was not enough just to be forgiven; I needed to be baptized. All of this was under her encouragement.

Then I went off to college. I got married and went to work for Lockheed in Atlanta, GA as an aerospace engineer. Life was great. I got my first job making \$5200 a year. I was on top of the world. I had a new car, an apartment, and a wife. Things were marvelous. That was in 1965. In 1969 the bottom dropped out of the aerospace industry as a result of the first man on the moon. Once they got that man on the moon there was not a lot of engineering left, and there were a lot of aerospace engineers involved. Lockheed aircrafts, which was the one I was with, was building the largest transport ever made at that time. I was involved in that. I was flying on the structural test airplane. It was a marvelous job, but in 1969 we had done all of the testing and it ended. Boeing aircraft, another big space industry provider, had just finished developing and testing the 727 which has been around for a long time, but it was brand new then. All of a sudden, aerospace engineers were being laid off. Three thousand engineers were laid off from Lockheed in about a month's time, and I was one of them.

I really expected to be there and live happily ever after, but the Lord had something different. He was about to change my life forever. Actually the way the Lord works is marvelous. Delta Airlines is based in Atlanta. I went there to interview for a job, and he said, "Mr. Aman, if you want the job you can have it." Now I was out of work, my wife was pregnant with our second child; I had just bought a house, and I needed a job. I told the man I would like to pray about it for three days. He looked at me a little weird but he said, "Okay." I left, but nothing happened in those three days, so I called back and told him I would like to take the job. He said, "I am sorry but somebody else has taken that job. I said, "Okay, Lord, I prayed. What is going on?" But you know the Lord really encouraged me and I felt strongly in my heart that I needed to go back to Richmond which was my wife's home town and also where my mother-in-law whom I loved dearly. She was the one who continually encouraged me in the Lord. My mother-in-law was fifty years old, and it is amazing to me that the Lord took her nine months after I got to Richmond. So I got to spend those nine months with her. She had begun to share the Normal Christian Life with me from Watchman Nee, and had seen something of the church. She did not have it together yet, but she had gotten a glimpse of something marvelous, and she had been trying to share that with me but unsuccessfully at that time

Her passing away deeply moved my life for a long time. And what it did was to give me a hunger for life. My mother-in-law was full of the life of the Lord, and I saw that. I was hungry for what she had. I was in the Baptist church at that time in Richmond. Eventually I was teaching there as well. I was really into studying the doctrines. I had never been to seminary, but the Lord was teaching me a lot. I was really interested in this thing called union life.

Then a marvelous thing happened. Kenny Pittman came into my life. I was twenty-eight, and he was twenty. We met at work. He was working in the summers for the city of Richmond, and

that is where I had gotten a job. The first time I met Kenny, I talked to him a little bit about the Lord, and he was not very responsive. I finally asked him if he believed in the Bible and he said, "No, it is all just written by men."

The next summer when he showed up, I was going over into his section one day and I actually heard him sharing the gospel with somebody. So I said, "Lord, this is amazing for a man who does not believe in the Bible." So I went up to him, and I do not think he remembered me. But I said, "Do you believe in the Bible?" He said, "Every word! Every word is God breathed! Everything is from God!" So I believed that. It was an amazing time. I was naturally drawn to my brother. He was saved in the Assembly of God Church. They believed in the gifts and all those things we dared not touch in my Fundamental Baptist background. We would not even look at the book of Acts; it scared us to death. But Kenny was speaking in tongues, and all those things, and I could see the Lord in my brother. We would meet every day at lunch, and get together and have fellowship. It was marvelous fellowship just around the Lord.

One day I shared with him the book the Normal Christian Life. He came back so excited one day. He said, "Jerry, it is Christ, isn't it? It is all about Christ, isn't it? The Christian life is Christ, isn't it? Christ is the center; Christ is everything." I said, "Yes, brother." He had seen the Lord in a new way. It altered his life; it altered my life because I had been pretty steeped in the doctrines but was lacking in the life. And as I saw my brother, my eyes were opened. I said, "Lord, You are far greater than I ever imagined. How immense You are. You are the center of everything. You are the center of God's heart. That revelation to Kenny was passed on to me through my younger brother for which I am so grateful to the Lord. He had opened his eyes to see the immensity of Christ and mine as well. The Lord had joined us in a unique way in that special privilege of knowing and having revelation from the Lord together. It altered Kenny's and my life forever.

As we continued to fellowship, we began to realize that God had some purpose, some sense of destiny, something that He may be calling us to, something to do with this testimony. I happened to hear about a Chinese brother who was coming to Richmond once a month. I was curious. I wondered if this man might by chance know Watchman Nee. How many Chinese are there? two billion? The odds were pretty slim. The Lord put this in my mind and I could not resist. I said, "Kenny, what do you think? Shall we go and hear this man?" He said, "Sure, let's go and hear him."

We had marvelous times in those days. I remember before that happened Kenny took me to a meeting where I walked in the house and this man laid his hands on us and said, "I prophesy over you two young men; you will be walking together and serving the Lord together for the rest of your lives." It is true. I had never experienced anything like that, but you know it was prophetic, and I am thankful to the Lord for that night.

The Great News—"What is the Church?"

We went to hear Stephen for the first time. I was very doctrinally oriented, and had not looked into the book of Acts. But the Lord had begun to put a question in my heart and this was kind of a strange question for most people: "What is the church?" That was my question. I looked at what I was involved in. We had the pastor, deacons, all the New Testament order, but something did not seem to be right. We were well organized and greatly involved in sharing the gospel, supporting missionaries, which is all good, but still I wondered: "What is it? What is the

church?" I went to hear Stephen, and he shared on the book of Acts, chapter 1, the birth of the church. I am thinking: the birth of the church? The church is born? Really? I thought the church was just deacons getting together and forming an organization in which we could share the gospel. But I found out that the church was birthed at Pentecost; it was real and alive. And when our brother said the church is a living organism, not an organization; that is when it clicked. I said, "Lord, I see it, the living body of Jesus Christ. I missed it. How far we have fallen short of what Your church is. It is a living thing, organic in nature. It is Christ." I was amazed. That turned my life around. Kenny saw it that night, too. Once again we found our lives being altered and we were together. What is the church? It was an amazing thing.

The Beginning of the Richmond Christian Fellowship

Stephen would come and meet with a group of five sisters and others. They would meet on Sunday afternoons to worship together and pray. So we started going on Sunday afternoon. We still met where we had been going, but it was amazing. It was the first time I had ever worshiped the Lord corporately. I enjoyed it so much, just like tonight, just worshiping the Lord. After you do it for many years you can kind of take it for granted. Don't; it is a precious thing. It was a marvelous time.

A few months after that some things happened in the little Baptist church I was in. They caught a teacher smoking; you could not do that. That was one of the rules. They came around and said, "We want all of the teachers to sign a covenant. You had to believe Jesus is the Son of God, the Bible is the inspired Word of God, all the good stuff. Now they also required you to be pre-millennialist which I was at the time. You could not drink, smoke, dance, go to movies. They brought this to me, and I had been listening to all of this living ministry the Lord was doing, and all of a sudden I see this thing and I said, "What is this?" They said, "Well, brother Jerry, all the teachers will be required to sign this. Do you have any problems with anything here?" I said, "No, but I have gone to a few movies at times." And they said, "Was it a good movie?" And I said, "Yes, it was a good movie." So they said, "All right." And they let me pass on that one, but I said, "I cannot sign this." I had not planned this at all, but the Lord brought it to my heart. A Christian only has one covenant, and it is a covenant with the Lord Jesus Christ signed in His blood, and that is the only covenant in which we can live. We cannot have other covenants. I just cannot sign this thing." So they said, "Okay Jerry, can you teach one more Sunday?" I said, "Yes, sure." But they did find a substitute.

Then the Lord spoke very clearly to me through a sister in the Lord. She was not saying this to me directly; it just came up in one of the worship times. "When you are not certain as to what to do, follow the ark." The Lord spoke to me; I needed to follow the ark. So I did leave the little church. We continued to meet on Sunday. As we did, the older sisters began to pray and were sharing with Stephen as well. They thought it would be good to have a conference.

Somewhere in the early 70's we had two conferences in Roslyn, which were just for adults. It was a small conference of about sixty people. They felt like it would be good to have a conference to begin to share on this revelation of the body of Christ that was coming at the same time as the Charismatic movement. For them it was God's eternal purpose. So we had that first conference, and I believe Brother Fromke and Stephen spoke.

We continued to meet for another year. We were just growing in the Lord and learning more about the body of Christ, how the body functioned in life. It was an amazing time. Stephen would come down and share, and before he came the next month something would happen that applied directly to what he had shared. It was so living and real. Then they decided to have the second conference and this time it was Stephen and Lance Lambert. Stephen shared on spiritual responsibility. Now I want you to get this. This is what he basically said in that message. God's purpose cannot be fulfilled unless He can raise up those who are spiritually responsible. That message hit me like a ton of bricks. I had been enjoying all the new truth I was seeing. It was revelation, it was exciting, it was alive and real, and I was enjoying every bit. But that day the Lord showed me that I needed to be spiritually responsible for what He had shown me. It hit Kenny as well. I remember in the middle of that conference I had actually been staying in my house; I was not staying at the conference. In the middle of the conference when the Lord spoke that to me, I said, "Lord, I am not being responsible. All these sisters are doing all this. I went home and got all my gear and I stayed there. I said, "Lord whatever you need for me to handle I will take care of it.

After that conference, three of us brothers got together and determined before the Lord that we would meet once a week and pray that the Lord would raise up whatever He wanted to do in Richmond and stand for His will for raising up a testimony in Richmond. We went to Stephen about it, and he shared some thoughts with us. And that is the day I took up the torch of the testimony. I had heard about it. I had learned about it. I had been excited about it. I had rejoiced in it, but that day I took up the torch. Spiritual responsibility!

By the grace of the Lord we have been faithfully meeting once a week for forty-five years. It was because the Lord had captured us with His purpose. That was it; He captured us with His eternal purpose, with His heart. Finally He had brought us to the place where we could take up the torch, take up our spiritual responsibility. To whom much is given much is expected. Praise the Lord.

Brothers and sisters, the burden for this conference is that those of us who have been carrying this torch would continue to carry it. Keep on rowing; don't give up. Encourage one another in these days. And for those who have not seen, may the Lord give you revelation of what is on His heart. He wants you also to take up the torch. His call is to the next generation to take up the torch.

Brothers and sisters, as I started this time, I said it is the fourth watch. Times are difficult. I am so thankful that those disciples rowed and kept on rowing until the Lord showed up. At this conference, I am hoping there are many others, particularly the younger generation who will grab hold of the oars and row with us. Lift up that torch. We really carry it together. We talk about passing the torch, but we continue to carry together until either the Lord comes or we pass away and be with Him and others will carry it. May the Lord give us a sense of this burden for this conference and open our eyes that the Lord will bring us into His burden and be able to execute His burden in all of our lives. David served the Lord in his generation. May it be so of us.

Lord, we are thankful tonight that we are not sharing more truths, but there is something deep in Your heart that You want to see executed on this earth, and we want to stand with You tonight for Your will to be done to give us that Spirit of wisdom and revelation that opens our eyes. Lord, I remember the blind man, and You came to him and said, "What do you want? The

blind man said, "Lord, that I might see." May it be so, Lord, this week. And Lord Jesus, I pray that you will really bring us to the place where we take up that spiritual responsibility of carrying the testimony of Jesus. In Thy precious name. Amen.