

WARNINGS ABOUT THE TORCH OF THE TESTIMONY

1 Chronicles 13:9-12—When they came to the threshing floor of Chidon, Uzza put out his hand to hold the ark, because the oxen nearly upset it. The anger of the Lord burned against Uzza, so He struck him down because he put out his hand to the ark; and he died there before God. Then David became angry because of the Lord's outburst against Uzza; and he called that place Perez-uzza to this day. David was afraid of God that day, saying, "How can I bring the ark of God home to me?"

1 Samuel 3:1-3—Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord before Eli. And word from the Lord was rare in those days, visions were infrequent. It happened at that time as Eli was lying down in his place (now his eyesight had begun to grow dim and he could not see well), and the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord where the ark of God was,

Malachi 3:13-17—"Your words have been arrogant against Me," says the Lord. "Yet you say, 'What have we spoken against You?' "You have said, 'It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked in mourning before the Lord of hosts? So now we call the arrogant blessed; not only are the doers of wickedness built up but they also test God and escape.'"

Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who esteem His name. "They will be Mine," says the Lord of hosts, "on the day that I prepare My own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him."

Matthew 25:8—The foolish said to the prudent, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out."

Lord, we come to You and we thank You for the grace and mercy that is upon us. We want to come now in the name of Jesus Christ our Sovereign Lord. We know that He is doing a great work upon this earth and even now He is keeping the testimony of Himself alive. We thank You for those of us who are gathered together now in this place. We pray that You will speak yet again a further word in this matter of the testimony of Jesus, the torch of the testimony, the lampstand, and the church. Do help us, Lord, we pray by Your Spirit to interpret these things with the spirit of prophecy given to us in that testimony. We pray in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

We know the grace of God is upon us and in the end when the house of God is built according to the prophecy of Zechariah, there will be shouts of, "Grace, grace be unto it." The Lord, from start to finish, not only gives us grace to live in these days and to work and serve in the house of God, but grace to finish and to see His work capped when the Lord Jesus sets the top on the house. There is grace upon us. But in this matter of the testimony of Jesus and the torch of the testimony I felt in my heart to start out with a warning as you can see from these Scriptures.

Four Pictures of the Testimony of the Lord

Here are four stories or four pictures given to us all having to do in some way with the testimony of the Lord. We see the testimony going forward, but we need to fear the Lord because

it is a serious matter. We are talking about the very fire of God. We are talking about the very life of the Lord Jesus. We know that fire can never go out, but it is possible to mishandle the torch. So we have these four stories of testimony, but we will be reminded that the testimony is held in the midst of tragedy as we see in all these cases.

David Returns the Ark to Jerusalem

In the story of David, maybe some of us were like Kenny and those charismatics who saw the testimony of the Lord and started dancing and kicking up their heels. David was so excited about this testimony of the ark, he was running down the road, jumping up and down, singing songs, and everybody rejoicing, until a man touched the ark and had to die. Suddenly David's joy turned to anger, and he said, "How can I take this ark to my house?" But then the anger turned to fear and that is where David needed to be. How the Lord wants His ark to be carried up into the house of the Lord! But oh the carelessness of our carriage is something that needs to be reprov'd.

Samuel in the Temple with the Light Going Out

Then we have the story of Samuel. Of course, what could be tragic about the little boy Samuel? But the tragedy is that he was in a house, in the tabernacle, and the lampstand was about to go out. The old priests were so tired that they lay down and probably would have let it go out. Eli could neither see spiritually or physically anymore. Of course, here is the tragedy and the opportunity. Soon after this event the ark was foolishly taken into battle and stolen by the Philistines. Now the temple had no ark, and the only light in that tabernacle was the young Samuel.

There may be some young people here who see the testimony and the lampstand beginning to sputter. The older generation is not keeping the things as they should. But I trust that even here in this auditorium there are some holy men and women of God, young people as you may be, who will take care of the candlestick and in the end bear the testimony as we know Samuel did. Praise God, he not only carried the testimony but he passed the torch and started a whole new epoch as David was anointed king. But it is a serious matter, and that is my simple point.

Malachi's Prophecy to the Remnant

In Malachi we have this tragic story of Malachi who is a prophet and he is prophesying to the remnant. It is one thing if it is God's people in captivity who were worshipping idols, but these were God's people who had come back and risked their lives, paying everything to build the temple and then the city of Jerusalem. Here they are a hundred years later saying: "God says, 'I love you,' and they say, 'How have You loved us?' God says, 'You robbed Me,' and they say, 'How have we robbed You? How have we talked arrogantly about You?'" Such an attitude! What can the Lord do with God's people when they have such an attitude? "I have done enough. I have served; I have sacrificed, and look at what it has gotten me." What does the Lord do about it? His eyes range to and fro across the earth and find some people who fear His name, who are talking to one another about the Lord—talking about His name, what the Lord has said, and speaking about His prophecy. It says that the Lord notices them and writes their names in a book of

remembrance (see Malachi 3:16). Isn't that wonderful? They stood faithful to the testimony, but it was in the midst of an unfaithful people. There is tragedy that surrounds those who would stand with the torch of the testimony.

The Ten Virgins

In the New Testament we have this example of the ten virgins who all loved the Lord and who all knew the Lord, but some of them had not been storing up oil. When push came to shove and the end of time came, the whole point of the story is "watch and pray, I am coming soon." There were the foolish ones who all they could do was yell: "We are running out of oil; we are running out of oil." Too late! It is a warning for those, even as our brother Jerry was sharing, who in the fourth watch stopped rowing. I cannot think of a more desperate need for us as God's people today than to be filled with the Holy Spirit. If we do not have the Holy Spirit stored up in our lives with reserves for whatever may come, then we may find ourselves as foolish as these women.

All of these are just warnings. We know the Lord will have His testimony among those He will find in this earth. The question we would ask: Are we those people? What does the Lord require of us in these days? Where do we stand? Are we overcomers? We just sang it. "We dare not be defeated. Lord, make us overcomers." But who can say they are? Only the reality of our lives will prove whether that is true or not. Are we running, holding the fire of God? Is our torch smoldering with worldliness? Are we careless in this whole matter?

The Lord Jesus will Always have a Testimony on Earth

Let's take comfort in a few things. Humbly acknowledge that if it were not for the Lord, who can bear the testimony? First, I want to take comfort in the fact that the Lord is sovereignly keeping the testimony of His Son on earth. There will always be on earth a testimony of those who love Jesus with all their hearts, minds, souls, and strength and are willing to bear His testimony. It is because God's work is perfect. He is the One who lights the fire. He is the One who sent His Son. He is the One who ignites the torch and He is the One who keeps it. The perfections of His Son born in that testimony are unchangeable and they are so far above what we can know. Only by God's mercy does He reveal to us the hem of the garment of this One whom we serve. The testimony of Jesus is so vast, so huge, and it finds us small when we think about it. But there is a great mystery involved in this whole thing.

In Hebrews 8 and 9 the writer, who is writing to these Hebrew Christians, is encouraging them to let go of those earthly shadows such as temple worship, the sacrifices, the priesthood, and those things they relied on in the past. The writer makes mention of the fact that there is a true tabernacle in the heavens, and the Lord has gone in and made a perfect sacrifice and then sat down in that tabernacle. There is the lampstand of God in the true tabernacle—not a shadow but a true tabernacle in the heavens.

Here is the mystery about this matter of the lampstand, the church and the testimony. There is that which is perfect in the heavens—complete, eternal, perfect, and finished through Jesus Christ, the High Priest. However, the Lord wants something here on earth that corresponds to that which is perfect in heaven. Of course, it will not be perfect here on earth, but it will be

sufficiently filled with the reality of Jesus that there is a light that can be set on the lampstand. The Lord wants that correspondence. He wants that which we call the church on earth to bear in correspondence to that which is in heaven where our Lord is sitting. This is a great mystery; but the Lord is doing it. It is the good pleasure of our Father that here on earth there will be such a testimony. So, of course, we realize that God is very jealous about the Lord's testimony.

I have heard many teachings, many doctrines, and things in my years, but there is really nothing that is quite as awesome as the testimony of Jesus. There is nothing dearer to the heart of the Father than for the testimony of Jesus to be borne. Our God, being a sovereign God, is also a jealous God. In these days He has chosen a vessel and shaped it in order to place a lampstand and put the life of His Son aflame in this dark world. It is the Lord's doing. It is His sovereign choosing. It is not something we volunteer for. Really, in the end it is something that is pressed upon us, that faithfulness that Samuel was pressed to respond to. As Jerry asked: "Who will be responsible to carry the torch of the testimony?" The Lord is so jealous of these things. How wonderful that He can look down on the earth right now and find those people who fear the Lord, who are talking about the Lord and are testifying of the Lord. In their midst there is the sunshine of His righteousness over and above them as a testimony pleasing to God the Father.

It is also the sovereignty of our God that has kept that testimony of Jesus burning through the centuries. It is not man's faithfulness; it is God's faithfulness that has kept that torch burning and alive. Think of what He did through the centuries even in the little bit you may have studied about the history of the church. Every time things began to go dark, there was something recovered and the testimony was there. As a matter of fact, we do not know even half of the story of how people have laid down their lives to keep that testimony or torch of Jesus burning in the century in which they lived. Sometimes that testimony was so effective that it actually affected a whole country.

The History of Some Who have Held the Testimony of the Lord Jesus

We read the story of Germany's prosperity and the change that was a result of those who bore the testimony in Germany. We know the tremendous history of what happened in England and the blessing that was upon England because God measured her according to His children and because the saints were so willing to give, go out, do mission work, and preach the gospel. God blessed that country for such a long time. Down through the centuries God has been faithful in keeping His testimony.

When the printing press came and literature could be distributed, things even exponentially happened. When we consider the relatively small size of the Brethren movement in the 19th century, their effect is fully out of proportion. But because of the literature that was sent out, because of the life they lived in England and the sending out all over the whole world a testimony of the simplicity of meeting, the testimony regarding the second coming of Jesus, and other such things that had been lost in the clutter of church doctrine over the centuries, it is amazing how God sovereignly took such a group and did such a large work.

I cannot imagine that our brother T. Austin-Sparks had any idea of the effect of his ministry after his death. I praise God and am thankful for his family, whom I do not know, and for the executors of his trust who have freely distributed to all of us in English all the things I believe that our brother Sparks spoke or said. To give you an example of just how amazing it is, I was in Russia

a few years ago, and I visited a group that I had never been to before. The reason that group had gathered together was that a dear sister in Israel had translated the Sparks' devotions into Russian, and three pastors started reading it. They left the church and began to gather together because they saw something of the tremendous purpose of God in Christ Jesus. It was overwhelming to them. And it was all because that one dear sister translated it. Every day she had to go online, where you can get these devotions, translate them into Russian, and send it over. It is really quite amazing.

Of course, what can be said of brother Nee's works? It seems like they are almost in every bookstore. The books have been written now in many languages. It is wonderful that there is still a testimony among the churches that have been purified in China. So the testimony keeps going on. God keeps moving it forward.

I do not know if we will ever know how much of an impact the Christian Testimony Ministry has had. I think sometimes Jack has been able to come up with some kind of statistics of how many website hits have come from different countries. It is quite amazing. Two weeks ago, I was in Singapore, and I climbed into this guy's car, and as we were driving along, there was a noise in the background, and I began to recognize that it was me with translation. I said, "What is that?" He said, "Everywhere I drive, I listen to CTM mp3s."

That is the Lord. It just goes to show how much He wants to have that testimony resounding through the earth. It is the Lord's faithfulness in all of these kind of things. So we can look backward and see these torchbearers and the cloud of witnesses of those who have gone before and borne the torch, but we have also seen some of these torchbearers who have crossed the finish line. You know that there is someone missing here with that unusual accent. Well, he finished the race.

The question remains for us in this present time: are we ready to lay hold of this torch of the testimony? Are we ready to pass that torch along, this valuable precious thing to God which in the fear of God must be handled? Are we willing to do it? I sometimes hear reports of how God is moving in China, and I believe it, and also in South America and Africa. This is our question: Can God still bear testimony here in the United States? The country is in a very difficult situation, isn't it?

How the Testimony Moves Forward

How does this torch of the testimony get passed along? How does God reach outsiders like Jerry and Kenny? They were outside the camp and had no business being in there. How did God get them in? Even worse I was so far outside the camp and so far away from Richmond which was the center of everything that God was doing. How does God capture people and how will He move them forward?

May I say a few things? I do not want to just grind an axe, but I still pray that God will revive His church, and it is for two reasons: God looks down on the devastation of the church today, and if we pray and cry out, the Lord sovereignly moves to revive and restore His church. But the wonderful thing is that which God sovereignly does in the aftermath of such a revival. I do not know if you ever thought about that. It was actually out of revivals that recovery works were discovered subsequently. There was revival in Germany and out of it came what was called the Moravian Church. It was the Moravians who brought revival to John Wesley and a revival to

England and out of that came the Brethren. In China we all have heard of Watchman Nee and those who assembled there in Shanghai and Foochow. I wonder if we realize there was a great revival that brought up the spiritual level. Then we see the sea begins to recede, but there are some who have seen something more. And the Lord can grasp those people if there is somebody there to pass on the torch of the testimony. Revivals come and go, and in themselves they are great blessings. Many people get saved, but of course the main thing is that the church gets restored to a higher spiritual level. However, we also know that revivals also recede. Will God in His sovereignty place some people in places that enable them to pass on the torch of the testimony?

Now I make my case for the case made last night by our brother. There was a revival here in the United States in the late 60s and early 70s better known as the Jesus Movement or the charismatic movement. There are many of you here who were touched during that time. Isn't that true? For myself, I was. Some were charismaniacs. Some were just revived Christians from various churches. Something happened by the Spirit of God in a sovereign way. I am so thankful for brothers such as brother Lance, brother Stephen, brother Chase, and others were here to pass that torch of the testimony. When people said, "There is something more." They said, "How about this?" That was the sovereign work of God's grace. Think how He had to position people for that. So it was no accident that brother Stephen just happened to be coming down to the house of these charismatic women in Richmond and these guys heard about it and one thing led to another. In D.C. the same kind of thing was happening and in South Jersey. It was not an accident. This is why it is so important for us to be faithful and to bear the torch of the testimony even as we look forward.

The Two and One Half Tribes that Stay on the East Side

In this present situation since the 70s, a generation has gone by and the landscape has so changed on this globe of the church that it is really quite stunning when you realize the things that are happening. Of course, it is a very confusing thing. The larger church is what I am talking about right now. I do not know what you would call them, but I am going to call them the two and a half tribes that stayed on the east side of the Jordan, just so I can identify them. I was one of those two and a half tribes. I will not tell you if I was Reuben, Gad, or the half tribe of Manasseh, but I was over on the east side. These folks love the Lord. They preach Jesus, they do missions, and there are many of them. Do you realize that today the churches that are truly growing and vibrant across the world are the non-denominational and not the denominational? This whole thing of denominational walls is over. It is now non-denominational or independent. It is still a sin, but there it is. The denominations have realized that this thing of saying we are distinct is not cool and we need to hide. So in New York and other places, the denominations hide behind church names like the River, the Ocean, the Flood, the Rock, Elevation, Mosaic, the Bridge, Relevance. However, if you look behind it you will see it is a Presbyterian or a Baptist church, but they will not tell you right up front because the denominations are not "in" anymore. Non denominations are in. You know why? Is it because people realize the church is one? No, it is because the spirit of this age is inclusive and pluralistic. People just do not like names anymore; they just prefer vanilla. So we have the vanilla church. Here is the point. God wants to recover and give heavenly vision and show these people the testimony of Jesus. It is a huge thing.

Somehow those on the east side need to see the life of those in Canaan land. This is why it is so important.

I remember hearing my brother Stephen when he was going to Raleigh where I was living back in the early 70s. I heard his words, but I had to go to Halford house to “see”. It is when I saw the testimony of Jesus among His people, and then I came to the Richmond conference, which was in Randolph Macon back in those days, that I saw. I was an east Jordan guy, but I saw what was going on in Canaan Land, and I wanted to be in Canaan Land. But we who are perhaps in a smaller group supposedly in Canaan land where the testimony dwells and the milk and honey flows, if we do not have that life, then we have a torch with no flame. If people come into our midst and they do not see the reality—oh I believe this is the challenge.

There are many, many people who really love the Lord. I would have to say that among the ones on the east side of the Jordan there are many brothers and some servants of God who are very precious. Probably you read some of their blogs, their messages and some of their books. They are good men of God preaching Jesus, preaching the truth, speaking about issues in our country on morality and other such things. There are some very articulate men of God who are bearing a torch, but here is my appeal. If anyone is a servant of God and truly bears the torch of the testimony, it will produce a lampstand in the church. The problem is that when ministry is the bulk of what is happening and the body is not functioning, there is no lampstand. The Lord raises up men of ministry; I cannot doubt that because I see it. But for us, at least, here is the point—there is no point of doing ministry if it does not produce a lampstand. If there is not a corporate testimony, then all you have is a testimony of a great man of God who eventually dies and passes off the scene. Am I right? The Lord wants the church corporate to have a lampstand of testimony. We individually are responsible to carry a torch of the testimony at work, when we meet people, or even if we minister, but if the end result is not the corporate body of Christ in reality, then our ministry is off center of the Lord’s heart. This is my plea for many people who are on the east of the Jordan. I am sorry, I do not want to offend anybody. There is such blessing of being among the saints of God. But honestly, if the church is not being built, God’s heart is not satisfied. It does not matter how big the building is and how good the preacher might be, that is not God’s end; He wants the corporate testimony.

The tragedy is when our young people cannot see the difference. There is a difference between the testimony of Jesus and the lampstand corporately, and a ministry that lifts up Jesus in an individual way. May we see what the Lord is after!

If you grow up in assembly life, if you grow up in a place where there is a lampstand and the saints are trying, it is a tough place especially for teenagers. You are often one of two teenagers, who may be the whole youth group. “I had the youth group over at my house today.” “Who are they?” “You know, Joe and Priscilla.” They have to grow up with adults. Imagine that, having to learn how to pray, worship and contribute. Then they grow up and see the church of the easy lane, the church where there is no cross, and especially the church that recognizes their gifts and what they have learned of the Lord, and immediately they are made leaders. We are raising up leaders for the east side of the Jordan. That is why I will share about praying on this matter of our own kids coming back. Oh, if they could see the fire! But if they do not see the fire, they will not come home. There is more fire in some preachers who are out there preaching in the huge megachurches than in us if we do not have that true Spirit-filled fire of God in our lampstand. How the Lord desires that over and above what we may want!

There are many of those out there who are truly saved and love the Lord, and they have no idea what the testimony of Jesus means. If you ask that question, they have no idea. For those of you who are on Face Book, you have probably seen the guy who does interviews with people in California and just asking a basic question such as: "What is Mount Rushmore?" These people say, "I think it is in India." They have no idea. I have been to some churches where I have been privileged to preach, and when I mention the work of the cross, people say, "I have no idea what that means." Or if I mention the testimony of Jesus, they do not even know it is in the Bible, and you have to show them in Revelation. They do not even know the phrase much less what it means. But there are many who want to know what it means. That is what I am saying. How is this going to be broadcast forward in the future as we think about it?

Have You Seen the Church According to the Heavenly Point of View?

I do not want to start out by saying we need to start a television ministry. I just want us before we think too much about what we should do, spend a few moments realizing who we are. I like to ask the question: Do you know the church? Have you seen the church? Have you seen the church lately according to the heavenly point of view? I think that is especially important for people who often meet together and maybe lose sight of the forest for the trees. When you look at our scruffy fellowships, there are a lot that might concern you, a lot of dust kicking up, a lot of problems, situations, and things that need to be prayed for, especially if you are getting old, and everybody is sick, so now it takes all the time just to pray for sick people. So I wonder if we could look at the church.

The Lord is here tonight and I tell you why; because He is totally invested in this vessel upon which Jesus is to shine. Jesus loves the church and gave Himself up for it. The church is on God's heart. Jesus said, "I will build My church," and He will build His church. He has a love for His church that is so intertwined that He calls her His body. The church is the apple of His eye, and He wants to live a life so intimate with her that He says, "The church is My bride." The Lord loves His church.

There is a doctrine going around today saying that the church age is over, the church is in devastation; just forget the church. It is now all about guerilla warfare, so you have to be faithful and Jesus will come back. But the church is no more; it is completely devastated, as those would say. I think Jesus still loves His church, and as long as He loves it, I am going to stick in it. How about You? When you stick in the church, you stick in with Jesus because Jesus is in His church. It is the place we need to be. I have been so encouraged many times in my life when I see discouraging things, by that little phrase: "I will build My church." The Lord has to remind me because I get my hand in there to turn the knobs on the church, and then I hear: "I will build My church." It is wonderful.

If John is the last apostle in the Bible who saw Jesus among the churches, I think Jesus is probably still there. When I read Revelation 2 and 3, though Jesus commends and reproves those churches, He asks for overcomers in the church. Have you seen the church lately according to the heavenly point of God's view? Are you awestruck by her ramparts even as the Old Testament said in Psalm 48, "Walking about Zion, look how beautiful it is"? Have you seen the church lately with that kind of perspective?

I have discovered something in my own life and it is this. When I see the church fresh and new as God sees it (I speak as a fool because I don't see it as God sees it, but you understand.) from a heavenly perspective, then I am able to minister to the church here on earth. It comes out of seeing the perfect church. It comes out of seeing the glorious church. Have you ever seen that glorious church?

I do not know if anyone in this room, including myself, has had a dream or a vision like John and has seen the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven. Maybe somebody has had such a vision like that; I never have. May I tell you, and I do not say this in any boastful way, I have seen the glorious church because I saw Jesus in it. I saw Jesus ministering perfectly in it, and I saw that the church is one. I believe the way that we can see this church as it really is today is to realize that God says the church is a golden candlestick. How does that compare with what you think of your fellowship? The reality is the way God sees it and not the way you see it. So it is necessary to have our eyes opened by the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ that will then enable us to see the church as it surrounds Christ. What a beautiful church! God's creation created out of the very side of Jesus Christ—so beautiful. Can you imagine—putting it in the church context—being the queen of Sheba and seeing Solomon's kingdom? Can you imagine—if the Holy Spirit could open our eyes to see what this more glorious than Solomon's kingdom is—the church?

Just by looking at the Word of God, the Spirit can open up our eyes and understanding. Look at this from a heavenly perspective—"the church which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (see Ephesians 1:23). That is a staggering statement to think about. We are the fullness of Him. We are His body. So wonderful! What a large thought that is! "The church which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." How could He need anything else? And yet we are His fullness. That is a glorious church!

Then consider this: "That the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the principalities and the powers in the heavenlies. This is in accordance with the eternal purpose accomplished in Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 3:10-11).

Listen to this. Now the manifold wisdom of God is being made known to the powers in the heavenlies through the church. So are you saying that must be the church somewhere else? I think maybe the church in China is manifesting the wisdom of God. No, the church is manifesting the wisdom of God as it is here on earth. Think about that church. How precious is that church! How wonderful, how beautiful!

Here is another one: "And He has seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6-7).

It does say "in the ages to come," so maybe this is a future vocation of the church. But at least now it says we are sitting in the heavenly places in Christ. Now all of us talk about that, right? How many of you are seated with Christ in the heavenly places? By faith, Amen. In reality, I do not know. These verses do not mean that I can say, "Now you should be sitting in the heavenly places." No, this is saying you *are* sitting in the heavenly places. Do you see it? That is the question. Oh, to have our eyes opened to these wonderful things!

The Need to See the Church Bigger Than We are

In I Corinthians it says, “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus” (1:3). Now we know that the church is bigger than us. It includes all those who call on the Lord and His name; that is the church; that is you and me. We are connected vitally to something much larger than us. I think sometimes we have small assemblies because the ground is too large and people do not want ground that large. Just give me a little outhouse in heaven. That is enough for me. This church is so huge, so beautiful, so wonderful.

The Glorious Church

Or after that great prayer in Ephesians 3, Paul says, “To Him be glory in the church.” Wait a minute; one day, right? No, *now* to Him be glory in the church (see Ephesians 3:20-21).

Sometimes when we are reading such a verse like that, the Lord opens heaven and we see something that already is that we did not realize. There is something much greater than ourselves, but we are already a part of it somehow. It completely reshuffles our evaluation of the church and what the Lord is doing in our own place.

We are going to be His bride. “Husbands love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her that He might sanctify her having cleansed her by the washing of the water with the word that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but she would be holy and blameless” (Ephesians 5:25-27).

Wow, Jesus is high on the church; look at what He is doing in the church. Don’t you love being in a place where Jesus is and He is working on you? We should be without spots and blameless before Him. Even that alone is security because what it says is that He will not allow extraneous things in His church. He loves it too much. He is going to get rid of those spots. There are no Nicolaitans in the church. There are no Balaams in the church. There are no man’s ways in the church. He is going to get rid of it. He has set the parameters. He is perfecting His bride. He is going to do it. Now if you do not see that, then it seems impossible when you look around down here on earth. There is a lot of work that needs to be done. But if you see things from a heavenly perspective, then you see Jesus working here and now in the church. In His heavenly point of view it makes sense, doesn’t it? When you see what Jesus is doing in preparing His glorious bride, it makes total sense that the Holy Spirit is putting to death the deeds of the flesh among us. Doesn’t it make sense? The cross is being laid and is causing a veto upon human wisdom when we try to sneak that into the church. Thank God He is doing it.

I have a dual personality because In New York I actually go to two fellowships. In one fellowship, I am Chinese, and in the other fellowship, I am a young person about 30 years old. Now I am doing neither of these jobs very well. But that little group in Manhattan that meets together had about ten years of grace—just grace, good times growing, no responsibility. Then there was last year. We have had struggles and trouble over the last year, and one day we will look back and see what the cross prevented from coming into our midst. Oh listen, the Lord is building a glorious church. Don’t you sell Him short! I do not like it when people say Jesus has failed, that He has not built His church. I think we are looking from the wrong perspective. The Lord is doing a wonderful thing.

No Membership Roll in the Church

I remember when I first got out of seminary, the church was so complicated. I was made a pastor and a missionary, so I had a double halo. I guess I have always had a dual personality. We had to study things like ecclesiology. Do you even know what that is? It is the study of the church, and it was so complicated. Then in our Baptist seminary we had to struggle with things like the unregenerate membership. Every Baptist church has this. We had it and I had it. That means there are members in your church who are not born again but they are part of the church. When it was time to vote for a pastor, they voted. When it was time to vote for the deacons, they voted. Nonbelievers! But it is what they called unregenerate membership. It was very complicated. But I was helped greatly when the Lutherans taught me the secret that there is the visible and the invisible church. This was the conclusion that Luther came to because everybody in Germany was baptized and made a member of the church. The only trouble is they were all baptized as babies and half of them did not even believe in God. You have a church universal, visible, and you serve communion to all of them. But then you have the invisible church and those are the actually born again people. You have to devise a strategy to minister to the invisible but still keep the visible people happy. I am telling you, this is ecclesiology.

I was so happy today to see there is no membership roll except in heaven in the Lamb's book of life. You do not have to keep a regenerate roll and an unregenerate roll, the visible and the invisible roll. The church is the body of Christ and it is living. It is real and has the flame of God in it. Those who are truly born again are in the church; that's it!—even the ones you don't like. It just makes it so simple.

The Church is a Living Organism

In the seminary I attended nobody ever told me that the church is a living organism. In the four years of studying those books and hiding in the library, nobody told me the church is a living organism. When I saw that, it was a release. It was so exciting to understand that we are really connected to our Head, the Lord Jesus, and it is a living thing. He is jealous over it. He loves it and is in the process of perfecting it. What a change came into my life!

Have you ever seen that? Have you seen the church as a living organism? Please, let's not make that a doctrine at all. Either you have seen it or you haven't. Either you consider the person next to you as just another dot on the church membership or another person that you would like to get rid of, or you see them as a member of the body of Christ and part of a living organism where Jesus calls the shots. It is tough to be a pastor when you really know that only Jesus calls the shots. You can call yourself an under-shepherd but I think it is a bit more radical than that. Jesus is the Lord of His church. That is the beauty of the whole thing. It is His from start to finish. He is the Alpha and the Omega, and He does not want anyone else messing in there. It is beautiful when you see it in this kind of way.

From the heavenly point of view, our participation in this testimony of Jesus and His eternal purpose can only be done if we are profoundly abiding in the body of Christ. I do not know how we can talk about God's eternal purpose or the testimony of Jesus if we do not really function as a member of the body of Christ. Paul prayed for the saints in Ephesus that they may receive a

spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Jesus, but he was praying for those who had laid down their lives as a living sacrifice. They were functioning in the body of Christ. They were walking it out. The Lord shows Himself to those who are walking in the light that they have and obeying the light that they have. The testimony may vary from place to place, but people who are walking in the light they have, there is more to be seen of this glorious Jesus in His body. He does not show that to lone rangers—Christians who are Bible-reading Christians but are not part of vital fellowship. Why would He show that to you? What purpose does it serve for Him to show what is the hope of His calling, what is the glorious riches of His inheritance in the saints and what is the exceeding greatness of His power towards us who believe, if you are not functioning as a member of the body of Christ? These are not theories. This is something we see as we walk in reality. That is why it is so important for us to lay hold of the fact of how much Jesus loves His church and wants His church to be even as He has created it to be. This is the Lord's desire for us. Real vision comes to those who are walking in vision. Or real vision comes to those who are not walking in vision but having seen it they immediately begin to walk in it. God is pleased to reveal His Son in His people.

It is amazing when somebody receives a vision of the testimony of Jesus and of the church. Therefore, it is thrilling to me to try and imagine what must have happened in dear Apollos' life. That guy was such a good preacher. He even preached Jesus in the synagogues. He was a powerful dude. He really had the Word of God down, but then Aquila and Priscilla took him aside and told him about the testimony of Jesus. That guy was preaching faithfully, but he was not experiencing church life; he was just going to the synagogues because he did not understand. He was just baptizing with John's baptism, but did not understand what it meant to be baptized into the body of Christ. Can you imagine that? So Aquila and Priscilla talked to him. They said, "We are going to send you to Corinth." And he went. Can you imagine this dear brother, this gospel preaching evangelist to the Jews, seeing the body of Christ, seeing Jesus in the body, seeing the members functioning, a little old lady prophesying, seeing the gift of healing from some young brother, and all of this right in front of his eyes? He could see that it is Jesus, but he never knew it was the body of Christ. He was a good preacher, but when he saw this more perfect way, then the lightbulb must have gone off in him.

God Wants to Show Us Great and Mighty Things

Jeremiah 33:3 (KJV) says, "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."

I wonder if we could not pray that prayer for ourselves. Listen: "Call unto Me and I will answer you, and will show you great and mighty things which thou knowest not." I am the first one in line on that. I want to see more of the beauty of His church. I want to see His glorious church so that I can minister to the church as it is being perfected here on earth. "I will show you great and mighty things." I think we need to pray about that.

If I can be really honest, I have a feeling that one of the things that holds us back is this: *I do not think we see all that we are talking.* If we really call out to Him and say, "Jesus, will You show me Your glorious church? Jesus, will You show me Yourself as You exist in glory now in Your reality as Alpha and Omega?" Now get ready for a collapse because if you see such a glorious thing, it may be an undoing. But if we really saw these things about the church as it really is in its spiritual

reality, if we begin to share and testify of this one to another in the thrill of the reality of it, I cannot help but believe that the lampstand will be found in the midst with the light of Jesus on top of it and the testimony of Jesus being borne. These great and wondrous things are not new things, new revelations or extra Biblical insights. These great and wondrous things are just the one thing seen in a greater vastness in fuller dimension than ever before. Wouldn't that be wonderful if we could be those who said, "I cannot explain what I have seen, but I have seen something so wonderful." I do not think young people are going to be captured by doctrine, but I do believe young people will be captured if they see a vision in the midst.

The Testimony is to be Borne by a Corporate Assembly

Finally, the torch of the testimony in my understanding is to be borne by a corporate assembly. The Lord desires that the testimony of Jesus, that lampstand has to be a corporate testimony as we meet in our various places. There are some people here who love the Lord. You have been through so much, but in the end, if our lives can count in a corporate testimony, what a beautiful thing to the Lord! There is no perfect assembly on this earth, and there never has been, whether it is the church in Corinth or those seven churches in Revelation. But they bore a testimony despite all of the problems. What are the characteristics of this kind of assembly upon whom the light of Jesus is alit?

You can see God in the midst; that's it! You remember that passage in I Corinthians 14 in which a man comes into their midst and people are prophesying. His heart is exposed and he sees that God is in the midst. When we assemble, if we are really an assembly with Jesus there, His presence should be experienced. I am not trying to get soggy mystical and caught up in feelings. No. If anyone comes into your midst with a seeking heart, they should be able to say, "Wow! I see the Lord."

That was a wonderful word that Jerry said about he and Kenny going to that meeting on Sunday with those sisters, and they broke bread together and worshipped. And Jerry said, "Wow! That is body worship!" Do you know how many saints have never experienced body worship? We take it for granted. We sang a bunch of songs tonight, glorious songs, wonderfully led by the Lord from saints all over. Most people have no idea what that is. What a wonderful sense of the presence of God! Just to come where people are free to ask for a hymn and sing a song.

My youngest son grew up in one of these assemblies. We had gone to a Presbyterian church, and we were sitting in the back, and he saw the hymns up on the wall. He turned to me because they were singing and playing the organ and asked, "Dad, can I ask for a song?" I thought that was the most wonderful thing. He was so naïve. Can you imagine this sixteen-year old kid saying, "Could we sing 'Great is the Lord'?" Well, they did not know that song; but do you know what I am saying? That was his life, and it is a wonderful life. If you have grown up in that, young people, it is a wonderful life. In situations that are totally mapped out by somebody else other than the Lord you feel the restrictions on you. But when there is that wonderful Presence in the midst, an unseen throne, you sense that they are being led. How do they come to that?

There was one person who came to our scruffy little meeting in Manhattan, and it was a wonderful time, worshipping and breaking bread. Some guy was just visiting and he came up to me and said, "Now, how did you work out the details on this meeting?" He looked around for the oldest guy he could find and that was me, so he figured I must be in charge of the meeting and

that I told somebody to ask for Number 396, then you pray, and you break the bread. He could not believe it was led by the Spirit. I had a good laugh over that; I could hardly explain. But he had only known situations that were totally worked out where a worship team had determined the songs.

But the Lord is in the midst, isn't He? You can sense it. Sometimes He is leading and directing, sometimes He is holding down, and sometimes He is disciplining. It is better to have a throne over us than for every man to do what is right in his own eyes. And in the ministry of the Word which may not be much and may be feeble, but interestingly, when the testimony of Jesus is there, there is a certain prophetic element to the ministry of the Word in its simplest form even for brothers who are still learning their gifts. They can say amazing things in the assembly where the Lord Jesus is over them and leading them and teaching them. Isn't it wonderful to hear messages sometimes? Sometimes I will get a book. I do not know why the Brethren always printed little tiny books of which I have a whole number. I need a magnifying glass to read them. But when I open it up, I see such gems that came out of their assembly life. These things they talked about were revealed in what they called Bible-reading meetings. They would have an open sharing of the Bible and gems of revelation came out just in the assembly. Oh, may that be so with us!

Such an assembly where you can sense that life of God in their midst is also going to face persecutions; that is a sure thing. The enemy is not going to like it. Religious people are not going to like it. The world is not going to like the light that is borne by your lampstand.

The testimony of Jesus is life. Oh, how we need that life! Everything else is just doctrine, talk, tradition. When His life is there, everything becomes exciting. There is a flame in the midst. The Lord wants to recover the flame.

The Glory in the Church

So I just wanted to start with just looking again at the church to see if we see it the way the Lord sees it—the glory in the church, the wonder in the church, to praise God for His church, to be built into that church, to submit to that church, to live by the life of Jesus among His people. This is what we pray. It will be so profitable for all of us if we search our hearts, and say where we gather together: Is our torch devoid of flame? Is our lampstand without light? We need to examine ourselves. Take it seriously. Surely the Lord wants to place His testimony in the hearts of all those who fear His name and talk about Him together. Let's pray for that to happen in our own midst.

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus, we are so thankful that You are the Head of the church. It is not really that we see the church as something that is separate from You; but the whole point is that we see the church as it is in You. That is something so totally different than we are often aware of as we look around us from person to person. Lord, You have something that You are doing that is absolutely glorious. Your sovereign hand is upon Your people. I pray that You will humble all of us so none of us takes vain glory or credit for being something that we are not. In the fear of God we would say, Lord, if we have a torch, do lighten it by the Holy Spirit and let the oil be pure and the light be bright. May

the end of us bearing the torch be a lampstand testimony corporately expressed somewhere on the face of this earth where Jesus gets the glory and the wisdom of God is seen by the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. Oh Lord, will You recover such a testimony even in our own midst? And as we think how that flame may jump from place to place, Lord, this is Your doing; only You can do such a sovereign thing. But Lord, begin with us. Help us to be real. Let Your life truly be seen among us for Jesus' sake we pray. Amen.