

WHAT IS TRUTH?

Hebrews 12:1-2—Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

John 14:1-6—Let not your heart be troubled: believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go, ye know the way. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; how know we the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me.

John 18:36-38—Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end have I been born, and to this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find no crime in him.

Dear Heavenly Father, we are grateful for the opportunity to read Your Word, and we do not want to add anything to the Word, but we know You want to say something more tonight. Lord, You want to speak a special word to us. It is Your voice; it is Your Word; it is Your truth that we desire to hear. We pray You will open our hearts, that You will prick our ears that we might hear the truth and we may be obedient to Your truth that you speak to us. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Personal Testimony

The burden that the Lord has placed upon my heart actually started a while back even before the planning of the conference. And by way of my own personal testimony regarding this conference I would like to share the burden of this passing of the torch of the testimony.

I am not great with modern dates as a history teacher, but I believe the first conference that I was able to attend was in 1986. I was in sixth grade, and we were at the University of Richmond. You noticed that our brothers are able to share from the 70s, but I was not born yet so I will stick with the 80s and 90s.

We had just come out of a large church back in our home town of Houston, TX. All my friends were in that large church, and I loved it. It might sound strange to some of you, but as a young person, I was able to go to Sunday school on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. We had Bible study every single night. As a young person I actually enjoyed that. I learned a great deal. I was quite shocked when my father came home one day and said, "We are going to meet in our home." I had no idea what was going on. I do know we ended up at this

conference in 1986. I was so blessed because even though my dad could not put into words why we had left this large church and why we were at this conference, the brothers and sisters here were so sincere with the love of the Lord. I would love to meet my sixth grade teachers. I do not remember who they were. I just remember they put their arms around me and taught the Word of God in a special way with such love. I know they were from Canada, so if you were one of those in 1986, please let me know.

I also remember listening to our brother Lance and how he spoke about Jacob, not in a doctrinal way but in such a real way. I remember going down to the basement of the dorm that night past curfew and reading the story about Jacob over and over again because I wanted what Jacob wanted. I wanted that blessing and that inheritance. Yes, he did not go about it the best way and nor did I in the future; but oh to see Jesus! Oh to be blessed! That was from this conference in 1986.

In seventh grade our brother Kaung gave a series of messages on men who have gone before us—Count Zinzendorf, Watchman Nee, several others. That lit the love of history in my life. For the first time it was not about wars. It was not about dates; it was about Jesus Christ truly controlling history. It was about men of faith who abandoned all to serve the Lord. I was hooked.

In eighth grade I acted like a typical eighth grader. I was not happy to be here. It was called a family conference and my parents were busy fellowshipping at the dining hall and did not have time for me. I think I even had the boldness to call them on it: “This is a family conference; why aren’t you talking to me?” I probably did not want them to talk to me, but I had to complain about something. At night in the commons, Dana shared with us young people. Dana has a strange way of talking directly to you even though there are fifty others in the room. He said very clearly, “If you are riding the coattails of your parents, you have to stop or you are going to be miserable for the rest of your days.” I could not believe he could read my mind.

In high school my family actually went through quite a few medical crises which left me confused. But this conference and the brothers and sisters here were able to shed a little bit of light on what the Lord was doing—taking us deeper and trusting the Lord.

At the end of high school my mother passed away. Brother Dana had such a kind comforting word. Brother Ernie Hile saw that I was being a little stubborn in my grieving because I refused to cry, so he was able to give me a strong word: “Son, until you cry, you are going to struggle.” I could not believe that one brother could give such a comforting word and the other one such a strong word. Guess what, I did not obey that. I was not going to cry because I was a tough eighteen year old. I went through one of the most miserable years of my life. One day I remembered our brother’s words and I began to cry. The love of the Lord Jesus came in, and I never questioned why my mom was taken so early. I am thankful there were brothers and sisters who were praying for me.

At this conference I learned that marriage was so much more than marriage for me and my wife, and I was able to see it in the perspective of God’s eternal purpose. Marriage was something that was going to be so sweet, but it is really about the Lord who wants to come for His bride. This puts it in a totally different perspective. Children were something that I thought was just the biological clock ticking, something that we needed to do next in life. Then we heard the word on sonship and the importance of the next generation bearing the testimony of Jesus. All of this I received from you brothers and sisters. Even doing the crafts, I remember painting a carnal Christian duck with the Sweckers at the same year that Brother Kaung was speaking about carnal

Christianity in Corinthians. It all came together. Now I want to be very clear, I am not using this opportunity to put this conference on a pedestal, nor am I trying to put any brother or sister on a pedestal. But what I experienced in this place with all of you as my family was truth. What I experienced was reality. When we go home from this conference, often we say, "Well, back to reality." But I learned that back home is not reality. Reality is actually something that we can touch here this week. We can touch the reality that it is all about Jesus. It is the testimony of Jesus, and only when we see Jesus, only when we see His heart, His love, His vision of the church does it really make sense what the testimony is and how to pass the torch of the testimony.

Tonight I would like to call it the testimony of truth. In John 18 Pilate asked one of the most profound questions in the history of man: "What is truth?" Unfortunately, no one was interested in the answer to that question, and this is where we are today in history. This is where my burden lies for this conference and for this time. As individual Christians today, do we find ourselves asleep? Do we find that the church is powerless?

Man was to be a Vessel of Truth—Satan said No

Isaiah 14 speaks of Lucifer: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O day-star, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, that didst lay low the nations! And thou saidst in thy heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; and I will sit upon the mount of congregation, in the uttermost parts of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High" (14:12-14).

This was the original prideful thought. This was an ambitious goal, and Satan made that his reality. From that point on, Satan decided to spin his web of deceit and bring it to man. After all of this God did create man in His own image; man was to be a vessel of truth. But Satan could not have that, and we see in Genesis 3 the serpent who was so subtle. I would like to read this deception because the Word of God is so powerful.

Satan Deceived Eve into Believing a Lie

Genesis 3:1-8: "Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which Jehovah God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of any tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and she gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of Jehovah God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of Jehovah God amongst the trees of the garden."

Adam and Eve had Become god in Themselves

From this point on we see a world's point of view of truth. Satan was right because he had spun such deceit. Adam and Eve actually felt alive in the garden because they had no restrictions, and to them that became a truth: freedom, no restrictions. Their eyes were opened to self, and they were able to see how capable they were in the garden. They suddenly realized that God was truly everywhere because they were god. They went over here and god was there because they had become god in their own eyes. They had no more questions because they felt they knew, and they knew best. Unfortunately, they had been poisoned with the world's point of view. Sometimes we have to look at the heavenly point of view. Unfortunately, they were dead. Adam and Eve had separated themselves from the very breath of life. They were spiritually dead, and they were only one physical breath away from physical death. They were blind to God and hidden from God. They became no use to God. They had entered into what I like to call educated ignorance. By profession I am a teacher and a principal, and it is not very wise for me to say that our world is full of educated ignorance. If we look at man's perspective of this story, we can justify much of it as truth, but unfortunately we are deceived.

Is Truth Whatever You Want it to Be?

Looking at this word of truth, I would like to look at Webster's definition of truth. Webster clearly says, "Truth is the quality or state of being true. Truth is that which is true in accordance with fact or reality, a fact or belief that is accepted as truth." The problem with this definition is that we have a new mantra in this generation—truth is whatever you want it to be. We have seen that in television and at the workplace. I cannot tell you the number of times I hear this: "It is whatever you want it to be."

Just recently, on a side note, I saw something on YouTube. Please don't get distracted by YouTube; but this man went through an exercise in which he asked wise college students many questions and slowly but surely they were coming into this realization: "Well, it is whatever you want it to be." Finally they asked someone like me: "Chip, are you an Asian woman?" It would be like me saying, "Well, if I want to be, then yes." That is how subtle this world has continued to spin deception and lack of truth. We cannot even look at truth and recognize it.

Truth is None Other than Jesus Christ

Truth in the heavenly perspective or definition can be worked through this way: truth is more than reality. Truth is the kingdom reality; but sometimes we can even get distracted by our Lord's kingdom because we start looking at the things of the kingdom. To see true reality, to understand truth, we have to look at the King Himself. Truth is the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).

It is interesting if you look at the people of this world describing Jesus just before His trial and crucifixion. These are all from people who did not know Jesus. The Pharisees are quoted as saying, "This Man received sinners." Caiphas said, "Jesus, You have said that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Pilate said, "I find no fault in Him." Pilate also said, "He is the King of the Jews." Pilate's wife said, "Have nothing to do with this Man for He is a righteous Man." Judas

said, “I have betrayed innocent blood; this Man has done nothing amiss.” In the end, the centurion said, “Truly this was the Son of God.” All of these are true statements, but it meant nothing to these people because they did not know who Jesus was. One of my thoughts when I was reading these quotes is that sometimes this is what our worship time sounds like. “Oh Lord, You are righteous; You are King; You are pure.” But if we are just saying words, the question is: “Is it real truth?” Is it seen as truth from the heavenly perspective?

What Hinders Us from Knowing the Truth?

What hinders us from knowing the truth? When I was considering and meditating on the story of Pilate, I could not help but think this was a great opportunity to hear from the Truth what the truth is. At this praetorian, so many people could have heard truth. At this trial of the ages, the Roman Empire, the richest power in the world as seen in Pilate had no time for the truth. All the Greeks who wanted to learn the truth, debate the truth, come into the truth were too busy learning and they were not present before the Lord. The Jews had no interest in listening to the truth because they felt they had formed the perfect religion of truth. Oh, how humbling this is! These great empires, Rome and Greece, and one of the greatest religions of all times, which was Judaism, had no interest in the truth.

The Roman Empire

I wonder if today we have the same problem. Are we like the Roman Empire? The Roman Empire could answer any problem because it was such a practical government. (This is my history teacher coming out in me.) The Roman Empire was known for their practicality. If the people needed water, they built aqueducts. To this day we can see these beautiful edifices of water being brought into towns. If the great Roman Empire needed to control the people, it could do so by feeding and entertaining them. Of course, we know that is why they had the gladiatorial games. If they needed to control their enemies, they invented one of the great weapons of all times, the double-edged sword. They knew how to conquer using their Roman turtles where they would gather their shields together and be able to take any force. They also knew it was very practical for them to know their political friends. There was always political wrangling to make sure you were on the right side of politics in the Roman Empire. And most of all, they knew how to be very practical in obeying Caesar—one leader, one god, so to speak.

The Greek Empire

We could talk all night about how great the Greeks were. They were studying geometry so they could build great buildings and they could travel the world. The Greeks were busy with modern medicine so that they could cure men from all their illnesses. The Greeks were busy with philosophy so that they could educate themselves into bliss. The Greeks invented democracy knowing that the will of the people would always have its way. They were busy with modern science so they could explain every natural event.

The Jewish Nation

The Jews and the religion of the Jews kept them busy doing works because everyone knew that God was satisfied with man's work. They set up ritual meetings so that man could be conditionally faithful worshipers. They obeyed the Law to perfection because God likes the Law, therefore God likes those who abide by the Law. They practiced self-righteousness, works, service, and best of all religious exclusivity.

Rome had no time for the truth. They were busy conquering the world. Greece did not have time for the truth because they were busy learning the truth. Jews did not have time for the truth because they were too busy being the truth. Ironically they all had the opportunity; even Pilate put up a sign above the cross in Latin, Hebrew, and Greek, "Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews." We look at these three empires and we sort of scoff. They had the opportunity but were too busy conquering and learning the world.

Has the Church Sold Its Birthright of Truth for the Deceits of the World?

I would like to consider whether we have been doing the same thing in this generation. Have we been doing the same thing in the church? Have we been like Esau and sold our birthright of truth for the deceits of the world? Let's consider how we function as the church.

Are we like the Romans? We see so many that are hungering and thirsting for living water, and our first reaction is to buy them a book. We have to build something, design something, have the perfect Bible study. It is our nature. Lucifer began this deceit, and we bit into it in the garden. We continue it today. In the church we are so worried about the numbers. What if the people leave? Well, bread and circus will entertain them. Let's make sure the numbers do not dwindle. There is a new term that has come about which is church shopping. I am going off to college and I am going to start church shopping. The churches know that and try to be the best to win the people over. Do we do that? Sometimes there is spiritual warfare, and like the Romans we take our two-edged principles and start piercing our brothers and sisters. Sometimes we do not like others coming into the church and messing with some of our doctrines, so we form a turtle of exclusivity and bombard our brothers and sisters. Political wrangling in the Roman Empire was ruthless, always staying ahead. Do we make sure we have enough Christian service so that we will be indispensable? How could they ever have the love feast if I do not do the cooking? How could they ever have the meeting if I do not start it? We get ourselves into a position in the church, and then body life gets very frustrating and exhausting. So we come to the point of "You know obeying Caesar is the easiest way," and we set up one leader. We have allowed the Roman deceit to enter into the church.

Greece would be no better. We have traded the tree of Life for the Greek knowledge of good and evil. Instead of letting Christ build His church, we try to build it on our own. A neat little fact is that Babylon came before Greece, Egypt came before Greece, and they built some great buildings. But when the Greeks came along, they discovered what pi equals. In the Babylonian empire they had guessed that it was around 3 something, but the Greeks came along and said, "No, it is 3.14." They had come into perfection.

How many of us have ever considered how to build the church. We feel that we need to build; we need to get something going here. One of the brothers may say, "We know we want to

do this.” We may as well be saying we are building this thing and we are going to use 3.0 as pi.” The next brother who is a little wiser says, “No, we need 3.1.” Then the next brother says, “No, we need 3.14.” Then the next brother says, “No, we need to change something a little bit here; it needs to be 3.141.” We could go on and on. I know some of you out there have probably memorized pi to the hundredth digit because that is what we do. But that is what we do in the church. We get so fixated on perfection that we do not allow the Lord to build the church because we have the knowledge and understanding of how to do this.

The Greeks were going to cure every sickness. How many of us in the church when someone has a sickness the first thing we say, “Ah, they should not have eaten that. I knew the building was too cold. It was that vent that was open that caused that cold to come through.” We do not realize that everything we do has entered into this knowledge stage of Greece. The Greek Empire loved their philosophies. Have we ever been at a Bible study where we philosophize ourselves into doubt, into isolation, right out of vision? One of the questions that the young people posed today at our fellowship group was: “What do you do when there is this vision and it gets taken away?” So often it gets taken away because someone will come up and say, “I do not know if that is doctrinally sound.” Many of the young people have been scared out of fellowship because they are afraid they will not say the exact right thing at the right time. We have democratically determined like the Greeks the will of God. Oh, how efficient that is! We have our meetings and gatherings. Wouldn’t it be so much easier in the church to say, “Raise your hand? Okay, there is a majority, let’s go.” You know I like our brother Ben. He said there is a majority. He knew we were going to do it anyway. That is what the Lord wants to do. He is going to build His church, and He does not need our democracy. The Greeks tried to explain everything scientifically. Do we do that in the church? When we wake up in the middle of the night, maybe 2 or 3 AM, do we say, “Oh, I should not have eaten that pastrami sandwich in the cafeteria?” Or do we say instead: “Lord, why did You wake me up? Do I need to pray? What are You saying to Your church?” Oh, how we need to stop scientifically describing everything that is going on and instead see the heavenly point of view. What is the Lord trying to say?

Just like the Jews, we try to fix some of the religiosity. Before the Reformation and during the Reformation Martin Luther came in and said, “Works are not what will save man.” Today, do we do the same thing and substitute works for service? Service has crept into the church and made us feel that service is a ticket to God's eternal purpose. Do we have rituals? Do we know that every good house church starts at 9:30 and when it gets to 10:30 everyone starts getting a little nervous wondering who is going to end it or do we wait for the Holy Spirit and hear from Him? Just like the Jews, do we preach all the don'ts or are we willing to live the do's? Do we love unconditionally? Do we forgive one another? Do we repent? In the Jewish religion, it was very important to have a self-righteous salvation. Do we look to the rest of the world and say, “Wow, I am so glad I am not them?” Do we practice religious exclusivity? Are we the church in our own mind because everyone looks like me? Oh, how this is such a trap!

What are We Passing to the Next Generation?

So the question I have for all of us is: As a church what are we passing to the next generation? Are we passing a Roman torch, a Greek torch, a Jewish torch, or like the good old American way celebrating July 4th do we take the best remnants of all three, mix them all together, and have

the Western church that the Lord is so happy with? There was only one Man who ever walked this earth who could say, “It was not the Roman way, the Greek way, the Jewish way, or all the other ways of the empires.” That is our Lord Jesus, and only He had the right to say, “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail.”

Who was this Man Jesus?

So we do need to look at this Man Jesus. Who was this Man? We can learn a lot about a man or person through what a mother says about him. I mentioned earlier that I am a teacher and high school principal, and I get a lot of opportunities to talk to parents. I love to hear the different stories they have for their children. For example, I will say to someone, “Your son graduated many years ago. How is he doing?” “Well, he finished his Ivy League schooling. He cannot decide which of the five Ivy League graduate schools he will attend. I think he might buy a five bedroom house because he might marry his girlfriend once she finishes getting her MD/PHD. Now he does go to church on Sunday; it is just enough to keep the torch of the testimony flickering.” Now I exaggerate, but do I? What message are our children hearing? Are our children hearing, “Yes, you can follow the Lord—study your SAT words. Love the Lord with your whole heart—we just got a letter from Harvard, open it quickly. You know your sister got two master degrees. You are our son; what are you going to do?” This is what our children are hearing. You may not think they are hearing it, but that is what they are hearing.

I am a dad. It is so hard not to mention how the boys are doing. But every time I mention what they are doing they are remembering what is important to dad. Am I willing to say, “Boys, love the Lord. Love Him with your whole heart. I want to look at your spiritual report card. That is all that is important.”

Imagine Mary Talking about Her Son Jesus

What would Mary have said about Jesus? Bear with me as we imagine maybe a love feast and the sisters are gathering around Mary, and they are asking her: “What is up with Jesus?”

“Well, He should be studying for His AP carpenter exam, but He sure spends a lot of time reading Isaiah. He is a carpenter but He is not doing much of that now. He does just enough so that He can be about His Father's business. We used to get a lot of mail from the alumni association, but they have stopped sending Him anything.”

“Well, Mary where does He live?” “Birds have nests, foxes have holes, I have no idea what His address is.” “Have you seen Him lately?” “I saw Him at a wedding, but He only goes when it is His Father's time frame for Him to go.” “I am sure He has a lot of friends, right Mary?” “You know, most of His friends leave Him, and I suspect His closest friends may deny or betray Him sometime. He is greatly respected in religious circles, but He never takes any of the responsibility unless He is told to.” Mary said, “I think He may make it big time some day in Jerusalem, but all He ever wants is for me to forward His mail to Bethany. Yes, He knows a lot of people—professors, doctors, politicians—but He spends most of His time fellowshiping with prostitutes, widows, adulterers, sinners, failed fishermen, tax collectors, the lame and the sick. Mary said, “Jesus needs to work on His time management. He wakes up early with little to show for it except prayer and devotion. I wish He had learned more about money. He invested most of His money

in the shady bank of Judas, but He always seems to have enough money to get by and pay Caesar. You know, my Son Jesus does not have a diploma but every benchmark of His life, His instructor says, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

Can we say that about our children? Is that the tone we set for them? You know Jesus' friends knew Him as well. After the feeding of the five thousand Philip said, "You know what? I think He is the bread of life." And after Mary Magdalene had the seven demons driven out, said, "I think Jesus is the light of the world." Nathanael saw Him as the gate into heaven with the angels ascending and descending upon Him. Peter, with every crack of the rod and of the staff, said, "I see Him as My good Shepherd." Did Lazarus have any doubt that Jesus was the resurrection and the life? John knew from ministry to the cross to the ascension to revelation that Jesus was the way, the truth, and the life. Andrew witnessed a sustaining vine as the first disciple until his own martyrdom. These friends knew Jesus. They knew the testimony of truth because they lived the life with Him.

How do We Pray for Revival?

We are living in desperate times. We have no more time for setting up our children to be successful in this world. If the Lord is going to be satisfied with His church, there needs to be revival; there needs to be recovery. There is no greater place to see this I believe than in Acts 5. It is a very familiar story, but I liken it to what is going on today in the church. In Acts chapter 5 the church was rolling along well, but then came the first crisis which concerned Ananias and Sapphira. These two in a very practical way were like the Romans, in a very learned way like the Greeks, and in a very religious way chose to lie to the Holy Spirit. It must have scared the early church when they saw the tragedy that struck these two. That is the tragedy we see today in the church. We have called ourselves the church, we have said we follow Jesus, but yet we have put so many things of the world first. So the question I pose now is: How do we pray for revival? How do we pray for recovery? How do we pass this truth to the next generation?

I am very appreciative of what happened in the sixties and seventies. As a history teacher, I wish I could go back and live the Jesus movement. More importantly, wouldn't it be great if it happened again? It does not have to happen the same way. We do not need to try to concoct camp meetings. We do not need for all of us to become hippies so that we can eventually become saved. We do not have to become very rich, then become very disillusioned and then come into all of this. We can just pray that the Lord will reveal Himself as the way, the truth, and the life. What happened in the Jesus movement is that our Lord recovered so much truth—God's eternal purpose, Jesus wanting a bride, so much truth. But what we do not think about and what we are reaping today is that Satan saw what was happening as well. As we have read, Satan is the deceiver. He did not come out in an all-out attack; he knew he was no match for the Jesus movement. The Lord was moving. Instead Satan decided to bide his time. So what did he do? He started whispering in the ears like he did to Eve. There should be no prayers in the schools any longer. And suddenly prayer became an offense at this time in history, and a generation of kids did not realize that they were missing out on prayer. Satan started whispering and saying, "Life is not that important; if you do not want to bring life upon this earth—if it is in the way, if it is not convenient, if it is not what you want, if it is not your truth for the time—then just get rid of that life. We have seen the great recovery of truth that Christ is looking for a bride. Oh, marriage is such a beautiful picture. We see marriage in Genesis, Revelation and the Song of Solomon, all

throughout the Scriptures. Oh, how beautiful marriage is. In the sixties and seventies marriage became an inconvenience, a confusion for the next generation which totally took away this beautiful picture. Our children are being indoctrinated in the school system that whatever is true there has to be a different truth, another truth. So here we are, a generation or two later that have no concept of the truth of the Lord Jesus that happened in the sixties and seventies.

Confession, Repentance, Forgiveness

Where do we go from here? How do we recover? I have posed a few thoughts as I read Acts 5. One of the first things the church can do as a command is that we must be willing to confess, repent, and forgive. The early church had to do that many times. I want to be very practical. In Acts 5 it says they were all in one accord; this is talking about the disciples. How can we be the church if we are not in one accord? If there is something in your life, in my life that we need to repent of, tonight is the night; this very moment. This is not something we can wait until right before curfew or until we get the fruit in the front of the auditorium after the message. If there is something we need to repent of, we need to repent. If we need to forgive someone, we need to forgive them tonight. It may mean a long evening with the spouse. It may mean a phone call to a far off brother or sister. It may mean that we have to say we are sorry. The church cannot be what it is supposed to be—a vessel of the testimony of Jesus—if we have ought against any of our brothers or sisters. We cannot allow Satan to whisper in our ear and say, “But you are right in this matter.” Or allow him to whisper: “Well, if they come to me first.” If we are going to be ready as the church, we have to clear our accounts. It is so practical, so simple, and yet it is so hard. But let's look to Jesus—He forgave, He loved, and His disciples saw it and lived it. What a testimony of the early church! That may be all you need to hear tonight because if we can confess and forgive—maybe it is the parent who makes that phone call tonight, who makes that first hand of unity tonight.

A Recovery of the Words of Life

If the church is going to be made ready, if we are going to be prepared to help the next generation, we need to recover the words of life. It says in Acts that they were released from jail to speak the words of life. May we be released from the world tonight, not so we can do anything else but to give and live the words of life. In the church there are many people who like to read the Bible especially the Psalms. You bask in the beauty of the Creator. But maybe the Lord wants you to do a little chewing on the Word. Maybe it is time to dive into Ephesians and ask the Lord to reveal the mysteries of Christ and the church. Maybe the Lord is saying, “It is time to be doers of the word.” Read the book of James and see that we need to be doers. Let's gather together in unity so the chewers, the readers, and the doers can be one and go out into the world and encourage one another with the Words of life.

The Recovery of the Headship of Christ

Thirdly, can we recover the headship of Christ? This is anathema, this is something that the world does not like. Headship—that sounds so restrictive. But it says in Acts that we must obey God rather than man. This is not utilitarian. This is painful to the soul and this is going to restrict

our religious freedom. But we need to look for every opportunity to obey the headship of Christ. Unfortunately, we have all been conditioned to look for loopholes. We read something in the Word and say, "Oh, the Lord is telling to me to do this, but if I read a little bit further maybe I can escape that command. Yes, the Lord is Head of the church but we just had a brothers' meeting and we decided to do this. Much more convenient." This is something that was lost in the seventies and the eighties, and unfortunately we are experiencing it today. In the Old Testament, when we look at the prophets, we see much judgment upon the nations, but if you look carefully the Lord is speaking to Israel. Have we considered that today? When we see what is happening in the world, is the Lord speaking to us? With all this presidential fiasco that is going on, everyone is wondering what is happening to our political system. We have lost all authority; we have lost all headship. I could not help but think when all the videos started coming out of Isis killing their enemies by beheading, I believe the Lord is saying to the church you have cut Me off from you. We need to take these events in history seriously. The church has lost the headship of Christ.

The Recovery of the Working of the Holy Spirit

We need to recover the working of the Holy Spirit. Oh, this is again not practical, and you cannot learn the Spirit. Creeds and patterns are so much simpler. Wouldn't the next generation love to hear a mom or dad say at the dinner table, "We are going to do this." "Why Mom? Why Dad?" "Because the Holy Spirit told us." In the church prayer meeting, when we pray for something do we come back and say, "We thought we were going to do something else, but the Holy Spirit came in like a whirlwind and said this is what needs to be done." When we start functioning this way, the next generation is going to get excited. What, there is joy in headship? There is joy in being led by the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit does work? Oh, we have gone so long without hearing that clearly.

The Recovery of the Work of the Cross

It says in Acts as well that the disciples rejoiced in being counted worthy to suffer for the sake of His name. Are we willing to take up the cross? We can talk about it tonight. It sounds so good tonight: "I am going to take up the cross. Oh, I want to serve the Lord and rejoice in the suffering of Christ." But when we step out, do we suddenly get focused on the world? The cross is foolish to the world. We have all experienced it. Consider it tonight. Have you ever looked like a fool in the eyes of the world? Then Amen. Have you told your children that you want them to be fools in the eyes of the world? I hope so. It is foolish to suffer when you can avoid it—that is the wisdom of the world and the world's reality.

The Recovery of Living Faith

There also needs to be a recovery of living faith in the church. We say that we live by faith, but do we? In Habakkuk, chapter 2, "How foolish to trust in your own creation a god that cannot even talk." And we do; we scoff. Oh, how foolish for these people to look at these idols they made themselves and to worship them! But when we look at the news, do we start becoming fearful with the European Union coming apart? We do. It causes our stock market to waver. What is

going to happen to social security? These are all idols made by man. We have made the European Union, the stock market, and social security idols that dictate us. One of the great tragedies that occurred in this century was the invention of retirement. I know this may be offensive to many here. Somehow Satan whispered, "You deserve to retire; you deserve a rest; you deserve not to have a care in the world anymore." That is good. But the question is: What are we doing with our retirement? Suddenly we retire spiritually as well. In retirement we should be busier than ever. There are grandchildren who need to be prayed for. There are children that need to be prayed for. There needs to be testimonies told. Oh, how these young people who are out playing right now can benefit from hearing your testimony. Take up that opportunity. If the Lord does grant you retirement that is what it's for.

The Recovery of Prayer

There are two real difficulties in my family's life. I remember very clearly as a young person wondering why our family was falling apart. Why all of a sudden are there so many messes? Why has it suddenly become so confusing? Now I understand. My grandmother who suffered with Lupus most of her life was a prayer warrior. She could not go to church. She could not go to the meetings. Everyone else had some kind of service, was busy, and working for the Lord. She stayed at home because she had to. She laid down and prayed for every single one of the family. When she passed, we fell apart, and I do not know if anyone knew it. Why is this happening suddenly? In my own life, when my mom passed away, I realized there was one less saint praying. How important it is for us to be a church, a body that prays! It is real.

One of the greatest privileges I had this week is the number of people that have come up to me and said, "Brother, I have been praying for you." I appreciate that. You saw my name on the speaking schedule and so many of you came up and said, "I am praying for you." What a privilege and an uplifting sense! I wish all of you could be on a speaking schedule next year so that we would all pray for one another in such a passionate way. We have no right to retire.

A House to House Ministry

At the end of Acts, chapter 5, it says, "They continued their ministry in the temple and house to house." One of the things I would like for us to consider tonight is: Do we have a house to house ministry? Are we washing our spouse's feet? Are we showing love to our children by bathing them in the Word and by encouraging them? Do we do the unseen, visit from house to house? Do we shepherd and pastor those who are not on the service schedule, even though it is not our turn? Do we say, "We are sorry?" Oh the Lord would love to look upon His church that has finally stopped looking at the outward experience, the outward look, but instead have the hidden love of Christ.

Disappointed and Hopeless

I left one group out that was not at the praetorian at the trial of the ages. I mentioned the Greeks, the Romans, and the Jews, but I left one group out. Where were the disciples? They were afraid. They were not very practical; they had left their nets, their jobs. They were not Romans. I doubt that they were brilliant like the Greeks. They had already left Judaism, but they were

fearful. They were probably disappointed and hopeless. Can we ask ourselves tonight if that is the condition we are in? Do we have a little bit of fear? Do I dare to go to my son tonight before bedtime and say to him, "You do not have to study for the SAT anymore?" Are we willing to look at our daughter and say, "Look, it would be great if you could take care of me when I am old, but if the Lord has something else for you please take care of His business and do not worry about me." Do we have any disappointment in our lives? Have we already messed up? Have we already offended too many people? Is it too late for us? Have we already made the wrong move to the wrong town? Do not be disappointed. The Lord will recover. Be faithful to Him. This is not the time to be hopeless. As our brother said, "The Lord can return before I pray tonight." There is no time to be hopeless. I want the Lord to return; you want the Lord to return. Oh may He return this evening!

I would love to see my boys again. They are off playing capture the flag I am sure. One is probably marching in the four year old room. But I do not need to see them again, not in this life. One of the greatest gifts you can give your children is to say to them, "I do not care what you do in this life, I do not care what you do in this world; I ask only one thing of you: love the Lord with your whole heart. If we can pass this to our children, I think the Lord will have to return. I think He would be so pleased with His church that it is so consumed with Him that we were able to abandon all.

Obedience

We see in Acts in the very beginning the church was born because the disciples obeyed. Jesus said, "Go, wait." As ridiculous as it sounds, they went, they waited and prayed. It is my firm belief that just as the obedience of the disciples birthed the true church, it is the church's obedience tonight that will usher in the return of the true King. He is the way; He is the truth; He is the life. By His grace may we see. May we be like Peter who saw the Lord, he heard the Lord, he obeyed the Lord, and when he walked on that water, he did the impossible. May we do the impossible tonight!

Let's pray:

Dear heavenly Father, we are so grateful that You have such love for us. Lord, we are so thankful that You were the way, the truth and the life. Tonight we are thankful that You are the way, the truth and the life. May it be our hearts' desire to pass this on to one another. Lord we have a generation in this room that is willing, waiting, and wanting. You show us the way! It may be a very practical thing that we need to do tonight. It may seem so simple but by Your grace may we do it. We want to be that church that no longer eyes its own garment but instead looks to the Bridegroom. Look unto Jesus. May we find ourselves looking into the heavens tonight saying, "Come, Lord Jesus." We do pray that you will cause us to be strong and courageous that we would be those who see you, hear You, and obey You. Thank You. In Jesus' name. Amen.