

THE SIGNS OF THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS

We thank You, Lord, for the privilege of gathering together in Your precious name, for the privilege of worshipping You our Lord, Savior and King. And Lord, indeed what we just sang is our prayer that we may see You and become Your captives. So Lord, we entrust this time to You. We pray that You will be in this time sovereignly and Your Holy Spirit will be in charge of the whole time revealing Yourself to each one of us. We entrust this time to You, even as we sang yesterday that You may take the bread of life and give it to us. You are the only One who can do that. We all come to You as those who have in ourselves almost nothing, Lord. Yet we present it to You and pray You would give of Yourself to each one of us this morning. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Revelation 1:9 (NASB)—I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

12:17 (NKJV)—And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and [hold] the testimony of Jesus Christ.

14:12 ((NASB)—Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

19:10c (NASB)—For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

I John 5:10a, 11-13 (NKJV)—He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself. [That word witness is sometimes translated as testimony; it is the same Greek word. Some of our English translations have witness, some have testimony].

The witness [or testimony] is this: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

John 20:30-31 (NASB)—Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

Hebrews 12:1-2a (NASB)—Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.

We will go over some things that have already been spoken but perhaps with a slightly different angle, and trust that the Lord by His grace and the Holy Spirit can make this not a repetition, which is pointless, but rather something He can cause us to see in a clearer way and enter into in a deeper measure. As you may suspect from what we read and from the theme of the conference, what is on my heart to consider together is this little phrase that we find in Revelation: the testimony of Jesus. This conference is about passing the torch of the testimony, and it should be clear to us that we are talking about the testimony of Jesus. This phrase of course is found only in Revelation; therefore we would like to consider this in the Scriptures that we have read.

What are We Passing On?

There has been a question in my heart as I have been preparing for this time and it is this: If we are talking about passing the torch of the testimony and we are not absolutely clear about what this testimony is, what are we passing on? I think that should be very obvious. Yet if you are anything like me, we have the capacity sometimes to miss things that are obvious. I feel that if we are really going to pass the testimony of Jesus, the torch of the testimony, unless we are absolutely clear on its essential nature, something will be passed that is not quite what the Lord intended and there will be some loss in the process. That was the opening question in my heart as I meditated on this matter. What is the essential nature of this testimony that we are called to maintain and pass? What is this testimony of Jesus?

A Testimony is a Firsthand Experience

Before I go there, there are two things that came to my heart as preliminary thoughts that would be important to mention which concerns the word *testimony* sometimes translated as *witness*. The first thing is this: if we are talking about testimony or witness, it is implied behind the idea of that word that a firsthand experience has happened which should be obvious. However, I feel that it is in order that we remind ourselves of that. A testimony or a witness implies that some sort of firsthand experience has happened. Now just to state the obvious: if you read about a crime in the newspaper, you can rest assured that no judge is going to summon you to court to be a witness of that because it is not a firsthand experience; you just read about it. So this whole matter we are talking about that has been a reoccurring thought in message after message is not a knowledge we have acquired, a teaching we have received; it is a firsthand experience.

A Testimony is a Life-captivating Experience that Arrests Your Heart

A second preliminary thought on this matter of testimony is this: in spiritual matters there is a difference. I just used the example of someone not being a witness of something they read. But suppose, by means of a silly example, you are standing at an intersection of two streets, and you happen to see a car accident, so just by virtue of standing there and seeing it, you are qualified to be a witness. That is in the legal natural realm. But in spiritual matters, there is something different from that. When you talk about testimony or when the Bible speaks of testimony, the implication is that there is something that is not just an incidental witness, it is not just that you happen to be a firsthand witness of something that does not touch your heart. This matter of testimony in the Scriptures implies not just firsthand experience, but also a firsthand experience that affects you in the deepest possible way. It is something that is a life-captivating experience that somehow arrests your heart.

The Testimony of Jesus Gives Meaning to Your Life

I was reading something from brother Sparks on the theme verse that really touched me and he was talking about making a connection. In almost all of the apostle John's writings he is

concealing his name. When we read the Gospel and see the disciple that Jesus loved, you need to do your homework to see that it is John, but in the Gospels and Epistles he is hiding his name. However, in Revelation in the theme verse for the conference he says, "I John was on the island of Patmos because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus." Do you see how John is completely identified with this matter of the testimony of Jesus? It is almost as if he is saying, "This testimony of Jesus is what gives meaning to my life." The testimony of Jesus is the reason for me being here. The testimony of Jesus is something that I am willing to pay a price for, and here I am on the island of Patmos because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

When you talk about this matter of the testimony of Jesus, yes it is a firsthand experience, but it is way more than that. It is a firsthand experience that arrests your life, that gives meaning to your life, and you will be willing, because of what you have seen, to pay a price, to give your life to that testimony. "I John—because of the testimony of Jesus."

I have not yet defined that essential nature of the testimony of Jesus. These are just a couple of thoughts to keep in the back of our mind as we explore this matter. What is that essential nature of the testimony of Jesus?

One of the wonderful things for me as I was studying and preparing for this time was realizing in a clearer way than ever before that the word *testimony*, sometimes translated as *witness*, is a very peculiar word. It is a word that the apostle John uses in a very special way that is way more common than any other writer in the New Testament. If my counting was right, in John's writings we find that word used eighty-three times in the Epistles, the Gospel, and Revelation. That is roughly half of all the usages in the New Testament which to me is amazing. It gives me the impression that that word testimony was always in John's mind as he was writing.

God has Given Us His Son as the Life

In I John I feel we have a quite direct definition of what this matter of testimony is. This is in I John 5:11: "The witness (or testimony) is this ..." (Next comes the definition. What is the essential matter, what is at the crux of it all?) "God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son." Now there is another thing that is amazing to me. Immediately the verse after that is explaining the first verse. It is not just that God has given us life as something in itself or just that the Lord Jesus has communicated to us something that is a part of Him. Immediately after stating that the testimony God has given us is His life and that life is in His Son, he goes a step further and says, "He who has the Son has the life." Do you see this matter that is behind the testimony? It is not life as a thing or experience, but God has given us the Son. In the Son, in this glorious Person that has been given to us is eternal life. The testimony is this: "God has given us life and this life is in the Son."

Sometimes I feel if you are like me, we can be quite dull or slow in understanding spiritual matters. I thank the Lord that we have a picture of this matter of the testimony. In the Epistle of John, you have direct language defining what the testimony is or what the essential point is—life in the Son. It is not something in itself. We have the Son and we have life in Him. That is the testimony, but that is direct language. Thank the Lord that in the Scriptures, we also have a picture or something that reveals. Remember that very famous proverb: "A picture is worth a thousand words"? Thank the Lord for those pictures because we are so slow sometimes in

understanding or in grasping spiritual matters. The Lord has left us with such a wonderful picture about what that testimony is, and I am referring to the Gospel of John.

Here is something that is quite interesting to take note of: the first Epistle of John closes in almost the exact way as the Gospel of John. The conclusion of both writings is almost exactly the same thought structure and correspondence, and when you read both writings, you cannot miss that. In I John when he explains why he has written these things and he is talking about the testimony, he concludes: "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God in order that you may know you have eternal life." In chapter 20 of the Gospel which is the conclusion we find something very interesting. In case some of you are thinking there is still another chapter, that is true, but John 21 is an appendix, so to speak. John by the Holy Spirit put that appendix there. However, the conclusion, the proper ending of the Gospel is the end of chapter 20. John says, "The Lord Jesus has performed many other signs, but these eight signs recorded in the Gospel are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and that believing you may have life in His name" (see vv. 30-31).

Do you see the correspondence? In the epistles: "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God in order that you may know that you have everlasting life." Then in John: "But these signs are written that you may believe Jesus is the Son of God and by believing you have life." "These things are written,"—"these things are written." Then there is "believing," and "believing." There is "life" and "life." It is almost the same thought structure in both endings. But one thing you have in the ending of I John is the word *testimony* and that is not in the Gospel of John. However, there is another word that is virtually, in my estimation, equivalent. John says in the end of the Gospel: "These signs were written." In I John he is talking about the testimony, but in the Gospel of John he says, "These signs were recorded."

These Signs Were Written

What is a sign? That is another special word that the apostle John uses. It is not quite the same as a miracle or a wondrous act. A sign implies something way more than that. First of all, a sign is something more than the act itself. A sign is there and there is something being done, no question about it. However, a sign implies that there is a lesson beyond the act that is being performed. There is something that the sign itself is pointing to that is greater than the sign. Sometimes we read the signs in John and just see some wonderful act that the Lord Jesus performed to meet the need of the hour. And yes, that is true. The Lord Jesus did meet the need of the hour in a wonderful way. However, the signs are so much more than that. They are pointing to something much larger than the action being performed. If you will, the signs are a testimony to a Person. They reveal this Person; they reveal His character; they reveal His dealings with us, His work in our lives. Signs are a testimony to a Person. If you will, they are the testimony of Jesus.

The Signs in John's Gospel Reveal a Lack that Christ Fills

Now it is not my purpose to go over the eight signs recorded in John; but I would like to give you some pointers that will hopefully ring a bell immediately. When we consider those eight signs in the Gospel of John, there seems to be a common pattern behind all of those signs. In all of

them we see a common theme that is recurring. There is either a situation of lack, which means something is missing or there is something that speaks of human weakness and limitation. Let me give just a few quick examples. The first sign that the Lord Jesus performed was at a wedding in Cana when He turned water into wine. Do you see the lack there? They were at a wedding and suddenly they said, "The wine ran out;" and that would be the end of the wedding. It would have been a complete disaster and shame for any wedding back in those days for the wine to run out.

Or consider the sign in chapter 6 of the large multitude of five thousand men, and who knows how many women and children were present. And the Lord asked, "How are we going to feed them?" Andrew finally said, "Well Lord, there is a young man here who has five loaves and two fishes, but what is that for such a great multitude?" Do you see the lack? Do you see that something is missing? Of course we know the story of how the Lord Jesus fed the multitude.

Think of the last sign in this book where Peter and seven disciples had been laboring all night trying to catch some fish, and in the end zero fish, nothing. There was lack. However, just one word from the Lord: "Cast your nets on the other side," and they caught one hundred and fifty-three big fish. Do you see the pattern? That is one of the two categories so to speak of signs. Some of them you will see the lack; others you will see human limitation, weakness, infirmity.

In chapter 5 there is a paralytic man who had not been able to walk for thirty-eight years. In chapter 4 there is the healing of the son of the official who was dying with a fever. In chapter 11 we find the account of Lazarus who died, and the Lord Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life, raised him up. In each sign the background is either a lack or limitation. In all of them our Lord Jesus, the One of whom the signs are testifying, is the One who reverts and changes the whole thing.

The Signs are a Contrast Between what we are in Ourselves and the Life of Christ in Us

As I meditated on these matters what came to my heart is that all these signs in one way or another are a contrast between what we are in ourselves, our natural lives, and the life of our Lord Jesus that has been given to us. Do you see the contrast? What are we in ourselves? There is either limitation or weakness. Now I am not talking about having low self-esteem; this has nothing to do with that. This is the nature of human life, and at the end of the day, it is either a lack or limitation. But what do we see in the life of the Lord Jesus? There is all abundance, all life. And the witness is this: God has given us the life of His Son, His Son Himself, to be our life. That is the witness. It is the testimony of Jesus. Those signs testify of this Person; they are speaking of the testimony of Jesus, of that Person.

In considering the word *testimony* or *witness*, the implication behind the whole idea of that word is someone who will attest about the veracity or the truthfulness of a certain matter which should be very obvious to all of us. If you are summoned to court to be a witness, the reason you are being summoned is because supposedly you are able or qualified to attest about the truthfulness of whatever the matter in question is. That is the idea of testimony. But here the Word of God tells us that this is the testimony—God has given you that life, that glorious, abundant life of His Son. In ourselves there is limitation, emptiness, vanity, infirmity; that is what we are. However, God has given us another life, the life of His Son, to be our life. But the question now is: Is that true in you? Is that your daily habitual experience? Are you drawing on the riches of that life which has been given to you?

The fact that we came to the Lord one day is so wonderful, and I trust that most here have believed in the Lord Jesus and experienced something of that life. However, do we realize that this is just a beginning? Now we have daily the wonderful privilege above all of experiencing how rich this life is! How wonderful, how full this life is! When you read the Gospel of John, you see all of those signs, but at the same time you have sprinkled here and there direct sentences that somehow point to that life. Think about that in chapter 1: “Of His fullness we have all received and grace upon grace.” This is the life in the Son. Think of chapter 6: “I am the bread of life.” And we know the idea behind it is that once you eat of Him there is satisfaction.

An Ever Increasing, Never Ceasing Experience of the Lord Jesus

I really felt as I prepared and considered talking about the testimony of Jesus that it is really talking about the vastness, the immensity of our Lord Jesus and Savior. But the question for all of us is this: Is this true in us day to day? I am not asking if it is true in a wonderful week like this. Thank the Lord for a week like this where we really feel that wow! it is like heaven on earth. Thank God for that! But I am not asking if you can feel it in a week like this or even every Sunday when we gather together and break bread and remember our wonderful Lord. Is this true in our life on a daily basis? I find it really wonderful that one of those eight signs in John seems to point exactly to that aspect of the testimony. It is nothing sporadic. If you came to the Lord and believed in Him, I am sure at least once in your life you know how wonderful He is! How He took your burdens away and forgave all your sins! But have you continued in an ever increasing, never ceasing experience of this wonderful Lord? I feel this is at the very center of the Gospel of John.

Is this Experience of Christ Real in our Lives?

All the signs are pointing to this Person who has been given to us. All of these signs, in a sense, are encouraging us. That is what he says at the end: “I have written these signs that you may believe and in believing have life in His name.” The signs are there testifying that He is that One and He is for you to experience and to have this testimony in yourself. But the question remains: Is this true in our life? Not as a matter of a doctrine, not as a matter of something we all agree as sound Biblical truth, but is this a reality?—especially from Monday through Saturday? I feel that is often where the trouble is. It is not Monday through Friday in this wonderful week; it is Monday through Saturday when we are back in the places where we live. Are we experiencing the riches of our Lord Jesus?

The Vastness, the Greatness, the Immensity of Christ

To speak of the testimony of Jesus is to speak of the vastness, the greatness, His immensity. I want to once again point to one or two things in all those signs that I feel are a testimony in themselves to the vastness of the Lord Jesus. Let’s again think on the first sign our Lord Jesus did of turning water into wine. We know that the testimony of the master of ceremony, the head waiter, testified of that. He gave testimony about the quality of that wine. You see right off the bat the wonderful contrast here of the two wines. The first wine ran out, and that is exactly like our natural life. I do not care how capable you are, how intelligent, how many degrees you have,

sooner or later you are going to experience in your natural life that it runs out. If you have any doubt about that, just go to a cemetery, and it should be very obvious.

I am not just talking about the temporal aspect. No, no, I am talking about Ecclesiastes which is the assessment of what our natural life is—vanity of vanities. One day we experienced this life, this better wine, or as the master of ceremony testified: “Wow, what are you doing? Everyone serves the best wine first, but you have left the best to the end.” Do you realize that besides the aspect of the quality of this life that is so much superior, there is also the immensity of it? How much of that better wine was supplied in that day? Just do the math or just see what the measure of those containers were. There were six containers filled to the brim with water, and the Lord Jesus produced the best wine out of that. If my calculation is not wrong, it is in the ballpark of between 150-200 gallons of the best possible wine. What does that speak of but a testimony to the fact of His fullness? “Of His fullness we all have received and grace upon grace.”

Let’s consider the sign of the feeding of the five thousand, which I find so misleading because there must have been at least twenty thousand there which included women and children. Whatever the number, it was not that each one of them just received a ration, a little portion. There is that little sentence in the Gospel of John: “each one ate as much as they wanted” (see 6:11). What is that speaking of but the One who Himself is the bread of life? How much of this bread are you experiencing? Is it just a little ration or portion and we go on in our lives murmuring how hard it is?—“as much as they wanted.”

As we look at the last sign, we find a whole night of fruitlessness turned into a transition of one hundred and fifty-three—not just fishes but big fishes. Do you see the stamp over all the Gospel of the fullness of this Lord? This is the testimony of Jesus, not just that He was given to you, but the One who was given to you.

The New Creation

Do you remember what Paul said to the Corinthians? “Therefore if any man is in Christ, there is a new creation” (see II Corinthians 5:17). You know our old creation. I am not a scientist, but I hear things. In this creation we are on the little planet Earth, but in our galaxy alone there are billions of stars. Our galaxy is one among billions and billions of galaxies, each one of them with their billions of stars. How vast is this old creation! But if any man is in Christ, there is a new creation, a whole new universe. Unlike this old creation, there is no corruption in it. It is only life and life abundant. How can it be that so often we seem to be content with just ten square feet of this new creation in Christ when there is a whole universe of Him to be experienced? The testimony of Jesus is that first-hand experience that arrests you. And yes, if you taste something of Him, how can you not be arrested? How are you not going to say just like the master of ceremony, “Wow, everything else is bland really, but this is the best, not just a trickle of it, a couple of drops, but abundance”? This is our wondrous calling. This is the grace of our Lord Jesus to redeem and call us to bear that testimony.

I want to say one more thing on this matter of testimony. Of course, there is this matter in the word *testimony* that implies something being expressed, something that is being proclaimed or declared, but I feel that we need to have clarity that before the aspect of expression or declaration, there is something deeply embedded in the testimony or witness.

He who Believes has the Testimony in Himself

Did you notice the wording in I John? It sounds like strange language which to me at first glance I thought there was something wrong, but that was my first reaction. "He who believes in the Son of God has in himself the testimony" (I John 5:10). Probably that sounds strange. Maybe you will think he who believes can give the testimony, can proclaim the testimony, can declare it; but the wording there is different: "He who believes in the Son of God has in himself the testimony." I am not excluding the fact that there is in the Scriptures an aspect of proclamation and declaration, but before that can happen the testimony has to be in us. Is this testimony arresting you, being deeply incorporated into your life?

Brother Sparks has another wonderful sentence on this matter. He said something like this and I paraphrase: "A testimony is someone who becomes the embodiment of what he is testifying of." Is this happening in your life? Are you so occupied with this wondrous Lord who was given to you, in whom you were placed? Are you so in love with Him that you are becoming the very embodiment, the very personification of the testimony of Jesus? It is not just a matter of experiencing it sporadically here and there. The implication is that it is a continuous, never ceasing, ever increasing experience of the Lord Jesus.

As a connection to that, remember again the feeding of the five thousand. What is the background for that story when our Lord declared later: "I am the bread of life"? What is the Old Testament background for that? It is the manna. The Lord said, "It was not Moses who gave you the bread out of heaven; it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven" (John 6:32). In other words, he is saying what happened there in the wilderness was that the manna which was given to the children of Israel is just a type, a picture of the reality that came in Christ. But here is the question: How often were they to take the manna and feed from it? Once a week, once a year in a wonderful conference? Oh brothers and sisters, it is our privilege that the Lord Jesus has been given to us to be our daily life every single day, every single moment. The testimony of Jesus is an ever increasing, never ceasing experience of our Lord Jesus.

The Lampstand

Revelation chapters 2 and 3 are pictures or symbols of testimony in the seven lampstands. It should be very obvious to us that the lampstand is a symbol of testimony. It is a stand for a lamp and through that lamp light is diffused. The reason why a lampstand is there is not just for itself. It is not just a piece of furniture as in modern days where you often find in some houses a beautiful lampstand in the corner just as a decoration. That was not the case back then. The lampstand was there to be a stand for the lamp, something through which light would be diffused. And this is the symbol, the picture of the church. The church exists to be the testimony of Jesus. The church exists to express the Lord Jesus as the vessel through whom the Lord Jesus and nothing else will be diffused and expressed. Do you see the testimony of Jesus in the beginning of that book? What I have been emphasizing in John and the Epistles is perhaps the individual aspect of that testimony. When we come to Revelation, the emphasis is something corporate. That lampstand is not just an individual believer; the lampstand is a corporate testimony. It is quite clear as you go through the Scriptures that this matter of the testimony includes both aspects of the individual and the corporate.

I John 5: "He who believes in the Son of God has in himself the testimony." I do not think it gets more personal than that. There is a personal experience and testimony. But that is not the end or the goal of that testimony. The reason we are to experience that is in order that there may be a corporate testimony.

Remember the experience that Peter had in Matthew 16? He received revelation from the Father, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." In response to that our Lord Jesus said, "I tell you that you are Peter." This is something very personal. Probably most of you know that the name Peter simply means in Greek a stone. "You are becoming a stone." Of course, the goal for that stone is not to be a stone in itself. It is not that the Lord wants to have a bunch of stones. Of course not! Immediately after that the Lord continues, "I tell you that upon this Rock, I will build My church." In other words, Peter himself through that revelation of the Lord Jesus, through that experience, through that testimony that is being experienced in him, he is becoming a living stone, and of course that is not the end of the story. The goal is that he can build upon the Rock of the Person of the Lord Jesus Himself together with other living stones. You can see the two aspects; the individual aspect of the testimony has to be in each one of us leading to something corporate. The goal is never something individual. However, the individual aspect is an absolute necessity. We cannot hide in the multitude as so often we try to do. No, he who believes has in himself the testimony, and then together with others there is a corporate testimony, a lampstand.

The picture of the lampstand comes from the Old Testament. This lampstand is part of the furniture in the tabernacle that the Lord had instructed Moses to build. There is one sentence about the building of the lampstand that is very amazing to me in connection with this matter of passing the torch of the testimony. Here you have the lampstand, which is the symbol of the church and a picture of the corporate testimony. And when the Lord gave Moses that revelation and the instruction about the lampstand, there is a sentence at the very end of that description that I feel is extremely important. When we come to the end of all those measurements and specifications of how the lampstand should be constructed, the Lord says to Moses, "Moses see that you do everything according to the pattern that has been shown to you on the mountain."

Everything is According to the Pattern

Do you know how many times in the Scriptures that phrase is repeated? I remember reading one of brother Lance's messages one time and he said, "Anything that is repeated in the Scriptures you better pay attention because it is foundational." Our brother is so right in saying that. Here you have something that is repeated five times, three times in the Old Testament and two times in the New Testament. It is either talking about the lampstand itself or the tabernacle of the testimony. "Moses, see that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown to you on the mountain." When it comes to this corporate testimony of the Lord Jesus, this corporate expression of Him, we are not left with any liberty to do anything according to our best judgment, according to our convenience, according to what the circumstances seem to demand. "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown to you on the mountain."

It is amazing to me that when I read the New Testament, it seems that the pattern of this corporate testimony is all over the place. There is the oneness of the body of Christ. How many times in the New Testament do you find that expression "one body," speaking of foundational

things? No less than ten times. Another pattern—"In Christ there is no Jew nor Greek, no slave or freeman." In other words, all natural distinctions are eliminated in Christ in the new man. And that is the testimony that the church should express. Another one—"the universal priesthood of all saints"—which we began the conference with a note on those lines. Our Lord Jesus has bought us by His precious blood and He has made us kings and priests. There is no special class that has a monopoly in the service of the Lord. All are kings and priests and all by the Holy Spirit are supposed to serve God in the body of Christ. Do you see that pattern all over the place in the New Testament?

Now I truly feel that there is a danger in this matter. We may all agree with the pattern. We may all accept the pattern as a matter of truth and doctrine, but at the same time we can tolerate things in the way we gather that become contradictions, that become hindrances to this reality being expressed. How we need to go back to the Word of God and see the pattern! I know very well there is a danger for us to get these things and to try to apply them in a technical way, in a mechanical way. If these things were considered before the Lord in living union with Him, there would be real fellowship with one another.

The Church in Philadelphia

We are talking about the lampstand as seen in the seven churches in Revelation. There is one of those churches that satisfies the heart of the Lord. To her there is a word of praise that sounds unique among the seven. Of course, I am talking about Philadelphia. What is that special characteristic? There are several things of course, but I just want to talk about one since we are talking about repetitions and it is something that the Lord repeats about that church: "Because you have kept My Word; because you have kept the Word of My perseverance." Do you see what can satisfy the heart of the Lord? I do not think they were keeping that in a technical way, in a doctrinal way. Oh, for keeping His Word in living union with the Head! See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown to thee on the mountain.

The Testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy

There is one other thing I would like to say from Revelation. There is that expression that is very amazing: "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Often times, we may think that the real point or the real theme in the Book of Revelation is a matter of sequence of events. That is how sometimes we equate prophecy in our limited understanding. At the end of the book what it says is so different. What is prophecy all about? What is the spirit of prophecy? What is the essence of prophecy? It is not the sequence of events. All the writings of John, including Revelation, revolve around the testimony of Jesus. True revelation is prophecy. But what is the spirit of prophecy? What is that essential aspect that the Lord is really after? The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. It seems to me that once the Lord obtains that testimony of Jesus in a company, everything else will follow, all the sequence of events will fall in the right place.

The Man Child

In that vision in Revelation 12 there is a man child that is taken to the throne of God. If our understanding is correct, that woman represents the church at large in the last days before the coming of the Lord. The dragon does not bother to go after her; but Satan is dead set against that man child. Now what is the characteristic of that man child? I think the last verse of the chapter gives us a very important hint. Once the man child is taken to the throne of God, then the dragon turns against the other descendants of the woman who have the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus. The implication to me is that man child which was taken were the first among the descendants who really obtained, settled, and established the testimony and everything follows. Once the testimony is there they are taken to the throne, and Satan is thrown to the earth. Once the testimony of Jesus is obtained, everything follows. The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

Faith

I would like to say one more thing. If you noticed in the Scriptures we read this morning, whether Revelation, the Epistles, or the Gospels, besides the matter of testimony being there in the Gospel in the form of a sign, there is another word there that is a key in this matter of the testimony of Jesus. There is this little word faith, believing. There is one sentence in Revelation that to me is so amazing and eye-opening. All over the book of Revelation you find two things that are paired. You have the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Five or six times it is repeated. Sometimes it is the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus (see 12:17). Then in chapter 14 something deviates a little bit from the pattern. The expression is: “the commandments of God and faith in Jesus” (see v. 12). It is like something sticks out of the pattern. When I read that, I cannot help but suspect very strongly that the Holy Spirit has left something sticking out for us to pay attention. The Word of God and the testimony of Jesus; the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus; the commandments of God and faith in Jesus. Do we understand that? They are not equivalent terms, of course. However, they are absolutely related because there is no way for us to have in us the testimony of Jesus, to experience this testimony, to have it incorporated in us unless it is by faith. Do you notice that in all the passages we read in John? “He who believes in the Son of God has in himself that testimony.” You see faith leading to the testimony. Think of the Gospel. These signs or testimonies about our Lord Jesus are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in His name. You see believing or faith in Him leading to an experience of His life. There is no way for us to experience the testimony of Jesus except by faith. And by faith I do not want for a second to give an impression that this is a spiritual virtue that you have to develop or that this is some sort of spiritual muscle that you need to flex now. Oh that faith—just laying hold on who He is, taking Him at His word and trusting Him.

Testimony and Faith

In the verse that is the theme of the conference in Hebrews 12, we find again the two ideas are paired—testimony and faith. There is such a large cloud of witnesses that we are surrounded with. This is referring to the previous chapter 11 which is the catalogue of those saints in the Old

Testament who are witnesses to us. Somehow they carried the torch of the testimony and handed it to us. How did they do that? What was their secret? Reading is answering. By faith Abel, by faith Enoch, by faith Noah, by faith, by faith, by faith, by faith. This great cloud of witnesses somehow by faith experienced the Lord. By faith they touched this testimony, and they passed it to us. As a conclusion to that, the writer to the book of Hebrews tells us: “We are to run the race.” Then there is that wonderful sentence at the beginning of verse 2: “Looking off onto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.”

Looking Unto Jesus

It seems that often times in this matter of faith we may misapprehend the central point. I certainly cannot produce any faith in myself. Sometimes we see ourselves in circumstances, whether it is personal, family, work, whether it is the age of the fourth watch of the night that we live in, it seems that it is almost impossible to go ahead. But then there is this little phrase that seems to connect everything together: “looking off unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith.” It seems to convey the idea that it is when we look off unto Him, faith will spring into existence. I cannot produce it; no way. When we look unto our Lord Jesus, He is the beginner of that faith and the finisher of it. When we turn our eyes unto Him, the impossible happens.

Peter Walks on the Water—What a Testimony!

As we consider Peter’s experience, isn’t it a testimony to that? Here is the Lord Jesus walking on the sea. Peter and the other disciples were scared and tired, but they were in a little bit of security that that boat could offer. Then Peter sees the Lord Jesus. As he sees the Lord, the amazing, the impossible happens. He said, “Lord, if it is You, ask me to come to You on the water.” The Lord Jesus said, “Come.” It should be obvious when you read this story that when Peter walked on that water, through the whole time, his eyes were fixed on the Lord Jesus. You do not have that explicitly in the text, but it is so clear and obvious. He is talking to the Lord Jesus. When we talk to one another, usually we are looking at each other. Here is Peter talking to the Lord, “Lord, if it is You, ask me to come to You on the water.” And the funny thing is it seems implied in the story that while he was walking towards the Lord, he was looking at Him, and he was walking on the water. Then all a sudden he turned and said, “Oh wow, what am I doing here?” There is a wave coming against him and the wind is so strong, and when his eyes were off the Lord Jesus onto something else, he starts sinking. Do you see Hebrews chapter 12? “Looking off.” I do not know what the winds are in your life. I know of some in my life, some I do not even know, but one thing is for sure: If our eyes are off unto Him—that is the secret of walking with the Lord, of experiencing this testimony of Jesus. May the Lord encourage us!

Let's have a word of prayer:

Lord Jesus, we commit these words back to You. We pray that the Holy Spirit will touch each one of our hearts afresh to see something more of You, something more of this One who is so full of grace and truth, that we may be arrested by such a vision and run the race before us with

endurance looking off unto Jesus the Author and Perfecter of our faith. In His precious name we ask. Amen.