

SOMEONE WHO BEARS THE TORCH OF THE TESTIMONY

Our Father, we come to You tonight in the name of our Lord Jesus. We realize how dependent we are upon Thy Spirit to keep the incense burning. Lord, even though our bodies may be tired, we pray that Your Spirit will blow that refreshing breeze and quicken us body, soul, and spirit. We come dependent upon You, Lord, in matters so great even as we heard yesterday. It seems like the enemy just waits for the man child with great hatred, but Your Spirit is invested in preparing that man child for the overcoming victory. So we pray You will help us to further understand Your will and way. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

I want to use John as the illustration of somebody who bears the torch of the testimony, and then Lord willing tomorrow night a simple message on Timothy as one who receives the torch of the testimony and carries it on.

Revelation 1:1-3—The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

Verse 12—Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands.

Verses 19-20—Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things. As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

What I am going to share will touch on various writings of the apostle John because we want to look at him as bearing the testimony. I would like to put in a plug here, a little bit of homework for the young people who were not in the ministry this morning. I would really like to encourage you young people to listen to our brother Lucio's message. It was so very clear and wonderfully presented as the testimony of Jesus. I hope all of you will listen to that because he is very clear. My own ministry is to obscure things. I will be speaking on much of the same ground but in parables and dark sayings, hard to understand. But if you listen to Lucio's message I think you will see, "Ah now I see what Dana is talking about." I would also like you to listen to Lucio's message because basically he ransacked my message. I do not know why he thought he had permission to run through all the letters of John, the Gospel, and Revelation. All he left me with were a few monsters in the book of Revelation but he took everything else. That is what you get when you have two New Yorkers speaking in one day. This is over the legal limit, but we have to let it go.

John Bears the Testimony of Jesus

In a very wonderful way, this book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ is John passing the torch of the testimony. This is the last thing we have recorded. We believe that he lived after

this, and church tradition tells us various stories about him, but he was quite aged. One of the stories that I love the best, and I have no reason to doubt that it is authentic, is that they released him eventually from Patmos because he was just so old. They brought him to the meeting in Ephesus and had to carry him in because he was elderly. When the saints saw him, of course, they all went crazy and asked him to share a message. So he said, "I have a message. My little children love one another." That was the last message ever recorded that our brother shared. But this book of Revelation is in a sense passing the torch of the testimony even on to us if we can be as John was in the Spirit. John was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day when he saw this revelation. It is a revelation so grand and wonderful that it takes the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Jesus Christ to truly understand these things.

When we look at John, we see a man who bore the testimony of Jesus. It says so even in this introduction: "God sent and communicated this revelation by His angel to His bondservant John, who testified to the Word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ." Here was a dear brother who bore the testimony of Jesus and shared it, and held the torch high throughout his life.

I would like for us to look at John in that light as the one who has borne the testimony of Jesus, the torch. John was a special agent. He was one of the original apostles, and was the last one who was alive at this particular time. But in principle John represents everyone who, by the grace of God, has laid hold of that torch of the testimony down through the centuries. It is God Himself who sovereignly prepares such a vessel to carry the torch of the testimony. And down through the centuries of the history of the church we have seen various ones who carried this torch. Some of them are well known because we know their names and we look at them as men of great faith who paid a great price to hold high the testimony of Jesus. But there are probably even more that we do not know their names, but they were faithful and bore the testimony even through the darkest hours of church history. John was an apostle and God sovereignly prepared him for this special hour. When there is a passing of the torch, there has to be one who is carrying it, there has to be one who is prepared to take hold of it, and there has to be a divine event that causes the passing; but God prepares the whole thing. So when we look at John we see one who was specially prepared to bear this torch at the end of the first century.

The Ending of the First Generation

By the end of the first generation of Christians, which was forty years after Jesus ascended into heaven and the church was started, there were some things that happened that changed the landscape of the church in those days. The first thing was that in 70 AD Jerusalem was destroyed. The Jewish Christians who had been living there bearing the testimony of Jesus escaped to Pella, a little place far away, and others dispersed into the greater Diaspora of the Roman Empire. In a way it was a shame that these Jews did not for the most part go into the churches that were already there, but many of them stayed apart. However, some of them became part of the church that has no walls between Jews and Gentiles. The reality was that there was no home base if you want to put it that way. But Jerusalem was no more.

Secondly, all the apostles had been martyred. It is a study if you would take a few moments really and read of the apostles according to church history and what happened to them; you

find they were strewn all over the world. These men literally took that commission to go out and make disciples of all nations. They went out to places where they did not even know the language; but the Lord was with them and mighty things were done, and they were often martyred in those far flung places. But it left John alone.

The third circumstance was that Paul had been martyred but not without establishing some precious churches with the barriers down—Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, bearing the testimony that Jesus Christ is all and in all. Into one of those churches, the church of Ephesus, John based himself. He actually continued to travel as an apostle, but he also lived in Ephesus.

It became apparent as they drew near to the end of the first century that John was raised up for that unique moment when the church began to have problems and needed to be recovered. Someone was needed to hold this torch of the testimony high as the shadows and the darkness of the world and persecutions began to affect the church. And obviously John was that God-wrought and God-prepared man.

John was Given the Charge to Recover the Church at the End of the First Century

When Jesus first saw John he was a fisherman, but he was mending his nets. As it turned out in the history of things, at the end of the first century when all the other apostles had been martyred, he was the one who was given the charge to recover the church, to recover the testimony of Jesus, and to mend the nets of the things that had gone on through that generation. When we talk about John holding the testimony of Jesus, the first thing that we have to help us, of course, is his writings. Now Lucio especially went into the Gospel of John and tread this winepress well, but let me just share a couple of things about the testimony of Jesus.

There is an objective side to bearing the testimony of Jesus and that is to faithfully preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. If we would truly bear the testimony of Jesus, then preaching the gospel of Jesus must be part and parcel of our lives. If we see ourselves as the church, as a lampstand with the light of Christ upon it, then we understand that the gospel must be preached. John, of course, ministered and preached the gospel through his Gospel as it says in John 20:31: “These things 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.”

The Center of John’s Gospel is the Person of Jesus Christ

Now the other three gospels also share the basic life, death, resurrection and glorification of our Lord Jesus and His victory. All of them talk about salvation, and John did too. But John wrote retrospectively having sought and watched. In John’s Gospel, even as he preached the gospel, he said, “Look! What does that sign point to? It is Jesus bearing testimony of Jesus.” John felt that even the gospel nets needed to be mended. So when he shared the gospel from quite a unique angle, what he tried to convey was not only the Gospel of Jesus, which is the bare bone facts of His life, His death on the cross, and His resurrection, what he wanted to restore to the church was something that was beginning to be missed a little in the presentation of who Jesus was, the nature of who Jesus was. So that is why he stressed again and again the fact that when we look at Jesus we behold the glory of the Father.

And Jesus speaking for Himself, said, “I AM, I AM,” because John revealed things that Jesus had spoken in confidence to His disciples, but until John wrote them we actually did not know most of it. We had no idea of John 14, 15, 16, 17—all those intimate conversations He had about Jesus’ coming, the coming of the Holy Spirit, the inner side of things. Of course, John’s Gospel emphasizes *zoe*, eternal life, life. John’s Gospel is all about life. So he would try to repair the nets by talking about these things, even things which we know were not in the other gospel accounts—Jesus is the Logos, the Word. This was a deep concept. But what was John doing? He was trying to recover something of who Jesus is. It is possible to preach salvation without mentioning the Redeemer. We gusty Baptists used to preach salvation and sometimes not even mention the Savior. We would preach righteousness but not mention the Righteous One. So John is trying to restore that. You know the center of our gospel is a Person that we come to know and receive life in His name.

John’s Writings Reveal Jesus as the Word of Life

Secondly, we see in the letters of John another aspect of recovery as John has been watching. John was a late starter; he did not start writing his books till he was in his sixties. He was not one of these young guys who has just gotten out of Yale and started writing at twenty-two years old. He was a faithful apostle, preaching the gospel many times. He traveled with Peter, doing many wonderful things. But later on in his life as he wrote these letters and Gospel, there was a depth that revealed the testimony of Jesus. In his letters, basically, what was he trying to recover? He was writing to the saints and saying, “Look, the Word of life, the everlasting Word of life came down and I touched Him, I heard Him, I saw Him, and I want to communicate this Person who is life so that your joy may be full.”

If you are going to be a Christian, you cannot just preach the gospel; you have to have Christ in you. So John says, “Abide, abide, abide.” He wants the Christians to see this which is probably one of the first things that gets lost in the history of the church as the church becomes more and more concerned with the outward righteousness, outward holiness, and outward ministry. The thing that gets lost is the life in Christ; even as Paul said “Christ in you.” That gets lost. Probably we know many Christians who are saved, who love the Lord and they have no idea what this means: Christ in you and you in Christ. But this is such a vital aspect of life that John says, “Listen, my little children, abide in His love. Young man, abide in His Word. Fathers, abide in the everlasting One” (see I John 2:12-13).

By the end of the first century, darkness had started to come in. Think about it. He said, “Now you can tell the difference between a spirit of truth and a spirit of error. You see it is not a question of false doctrine and true doctrine; there is a spirit behind these things. But unless we know the anointing within, then we are going to have trouble with false teaching.” Then he says, “You can overcome that which is in the world.” How? “He who is within you enables you to overcome.”

Once again, what is John stressing? The testimony of Jesus is the gospel that we proclaim, but the testimony of Jesus must be His life, the reality of His life in our lives. That is why when John said things like, “Little children love one another for God is love,” there was something powerful in the way John said it because the life of Jesus was saying it through him. This always needs to be a vital aspect of our life together. If we want to bear the testimony of Jesus, it has

got to be the life of Christ within us. Something has got to be crucified, something has got to be resurrected, something must be worked out of His life in such a way that people begin to see the character of Christ through us, the light of Christ through us, the love of Christ through us. This was the second aspect of the testimony, not just the preaching of the gospel, but fellowshiping by that life that is within.

Revelation Reveals the Testimony of Jesus

Now we come to the book of Revelation, and here again John is going to pass along the torch. This term “the testimony of Jesus” suddenly seems to come into a prominence as it is mentioned several times, “The testimony of Jesus, the testimony of Jesus; John, held the testimony of Jesus.” So we want to look at what it means.

What does this mean that he held the testimony of Jesus, or he bore the testimony of Jesus? It says, “He was on the isle of Patmos because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” Here is my question: Why was he exiled because of it? Now I know a lot of preachers who are on the radio every day and they could not get thrown into jail if their lives depended on it. They are preaching the Word but no one is listening or maybe their faithful ones are listening. But what was it about John that was so threatening about him that the Roman Empire had to exile him? He was like the Zika virus; he was so dangerous. What was it that was so dangerous? Was it because he was a powerful preacher of the Word of God? Well, he was getting old. I hope he had a strong voice even as our brother Stephen has had in these days. Praise God! But that was not exactly why they were afraid of him though that is part of it. Nor was it because he did tremendous miracles that he was a threat. There is something intangible about the testimony of Jesus, and I would put it this way. When somebody truly bears the testimony of Jesus in their life and in their ministry, the Lord bears testimony in them. That is to say when John would preach, the Lord would attest to what John was preaching. It was not just John preaching. Even though it was John preaching, Jesus was preaching. There was that unseen presence.

Now ancient art put halos on the apostles, and the early church still had some flavor of what this meant. Now these things look stupid. We cannot imagine why someone would have a halo over their head. Actually what they had was something beyond themselves, an anointing if you want to call it, but a little bit more than that, a countenance. When Stephen preached the gospel and was stoned, it said he had a face like an angel. How does that happen? When Stephen preached the gospel, there was something so powerful attesting to what Stephen was saying that the people could not stand it and they had to stone him. There was a Presence there. It was Somebody upholding this vessel because he had borne the testimony. When somebody bears the testimony of Jesus, Jesus stands with them. Because John did that, he was a threat. It was not just words he was speaking; they were words empowered by Jesus. When he spoke the Word of God, he was like a living Word of God. If he spoke about righteousness, you looked at him and you saw righteousness. If he spoke about holiness, you looked at him and saw holiness. If he spoke about love, you looked at him and you saw the fire of love pouring out of him. It was not talk; it was reality. Thus he bore the testimony of Jesus.

The Testimony of Jesus in His Church

But now the wonderful thing for us as we look at the book of Revelation in this matter of the testimony of Jesus is more than preaching the gospel. It is more than having Christ within you as it says in the letters. The testimony of Jesus is a corporate testimony. John had been an apostle in the church, and he had been living in that corporate testimony. But the testimony of Jesus that is referred to in the book of Revelation is talking about the testimony of Jesus in His church.

Across the Christian world today there are many preachers who not only love Jesus, they preach Jesus. They preach the gospel of Jesus, they know Jesus, they believe Jesus, they pray to Jesus, and in many ways they manifest Jesus on that individual level. But we all know what the Lord wants is a corporate bride. The Lord wants a corporate testimony in which the presence of Jesus can be known in the world. By that I am not saying that every time you meet as a group and you have such a testimony of Jesus upon your lampstand that there is going to be some kind of special cloud over your head. But it is the same thing that applied to Jesus when He walked upon this earth. John said, "We watched Jesus walk upon this earth, and then we looked more closely, and at some point we beheld the glory of the Father in Jesus, and we realized this was so much more than a man; this was the Son of God." That came as they beheld Him.

The church is supposed to be such a congregation of people assembled together living out the life of the Lord in such a way that if somebody beholds, if they look past the humble exterior of the tabernacle, as it were, and they look inside the church, they can see Jesus. The testimony of Jesus is talking about that church. When we read about that church in the book of Acts, was there a church building in those days? No. But if they went to Solomon's porch when the saints were meeting there or they went to somebody's house as they were gathering and breaking bread, worshipping, praying for healing, preaching the gospel, all those things that happened in those house meetings, and somebody walked in, they said, "Wow, God is here."

You remember when Peter was being threatened by the Sanhedrin to stop preaching the gospel, and he said, "I preach Jesus crucified and risen from the dead, and I bear witness of these things and so does the Holy Spirit." That is what made Peter and the apostles, and the church in Jerusalem so dangerous to the Jews. If they had been just talking some talk, they would have left them alone. There were rabbis all the time talking talk, but the apostles would say, "Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead. He is alive and is enthroned at the right hand of the Father." As they said it, people could feel that this was true.

With that attestation of their gospel the Holy Spirit backed them up with signs and wonders. I always say to young people, "This is our greatest asset when it comes to witnessing. Talk to your non-believing friend. It does not matter how they react. Tell them the truth in Jesus' name." Then when they go home and lay down, the Holy Spirit will haunt them all night long because when you share the gospel, the Holy Spirit says, "Let me at them. Let me at them." That is the way I got saved. When people shared the gospel with me at first, I laughed it off. Then the Holy Spirit got in my ear and I started having trouble. I said, "Maybe, no. If that happens, well no, that cannot happen." Then you get into this whole thing. It is the Holy Spirit when the gospel is preached.

People could see Jesus among those disciples, so they said, “These are people walking in the Way. Who is their drummer? Who is leading them?” You can sense Jesus in the midst of them. Church life was so wonderful back in those days. Paul defined the church in one place as the household of God, the church of the living God. I just love that. The assembly of the living God—that is not just a name, so don’t call yourself the church of the living God. Here is the point. They were the church and the living God was there. They were the pillar and foundation of the truth. When you walked into the church, you saw the truth. If somebody was prophesying, you could sense he was talking to you. God is in this place. That is God; isn’t that wonderful? It is so wonderful that we have that touch in the book of Acts of what went on in those early days.

Jesus’ Presence in the Midst of the Church is Unexplainable

The best illustration of what I am trying to say about this intangible testimony of Jesus over and beyond our lives is from the Old Testament and that is the Shekinah glory. It was a wonderful thing to see that glory come down on Mt. Sinai. It was a wonderful thing to see that glory come down on the tabernacle and then as the tabernacle went through the wilderness there was that fire and cloud, there was that presence of God. It was the same when the temple was arranged in accordance with the design of God that the glory of God came down.

This is in a way a picture of how wonderful it is to be this body of Christ, of sinners saved but in whom Jesus is living in us and among us in such a way there is this testimony over us. People come into our midst and say, “I do not understand. This is something unusual. I cannot put my finger on it.” I was somewhere recently and there was a brother there who is a minister of a church and he said, “Every time I come to this group it is the most unusual group I have ever seen in my life. I have no idea what it is about them.” It was just a simple group of believers meeting around the Lord and breaking bread. But this minister had never seen anything like that. Isn’t it amazing? In the big church that he was involved in, he had never seen that wonderful presence of God.

This Shekinah glory was not only the protection, it was the mark of God upon the children of Israel. So the church should have this mark—Jesus’ presence in the midst. The Old Testament picture illustrates the danger of having the tabernacle without the ark which is Ichabod, meaning the glory has departed. You remember when the ark was stolen, and suddenly Ichabod became the experience of the children of Israel. If the ark is out of the temple, what is left? And so there is a danger, isn’t there? I don’t know whether we sense the fear of God in this.

Even to the church of Ephesus, which I feel was the best of the seven churches in the book of Revelation, the Lord said, “I will remove your lampstand unless you repent.” That is how seriously the Lord wants to be the real, practical Head and life of the church—not just talking about it. What church group do you know that does not say, “Jesus is the Head of the church”? How many assemblies do you know where Jesus is the Head of the church? Now that is a whole other question. How many churches do you know where everybody says they are the body of Christ? How many do you know where the body of Christ can be seen full of Jesus, moving by Jesus, inspired by Jesus, gifted by Jesus? These things we take for granted and enjoy when we

come into a place like this. We sing songs led by the Spirit and people pray as inspired by God. These are things that are a touch on this matter of the body life in reality.

It is Possible to Lose the Reality of Jesus' Presence in the Church

As the church grew and developed and went through problems, suffering from persecutions and all these things that we see in the book of Revelation, in the midst of the fighting, the serving, and being faithful externally, there was the problem of losing that reality of Jesus in the church, the testimony of Jesus on the lampstand. You can still have the lampstand, but where is that light? Is it still there? So we ask that question for ourselves: Do we corporately bear the testimony of Jesus?

Now I want to say something. The testimony of Jesus is not a fickle, temporary, probationary thing. Oftentimes, mystics will get hold of something like this and they do great damage because they make it sound like the testimony of Jesus is like Tinkerbell. Here is Peter Pan and here is Tinkerbell. Tinkerbell is here and then Tinkerbell goes. If you say something bad, there goes Tinkerbell, as if you have the testimony and then you do not have the testimony. Oh, somebody said something bad, now the testimony is gone. No, the testimony of Jesus built into His saints is a durable and real testimony. It is not skittish; it does not come and go. It is not something mystical and foolish; it is a reality because the testimony of Jesus happens when a lampstand has been beaten out and people have been brought together. This is not something that God would lightly remove. I think we can assume that even among the seven churches in the book of Revelation with all of their problems they still had the lampstand.

In the passage in Ezekiel when the glory of God leaves, it takes a couple of chapters because the glory of God was so hesitant to leave the temple, Jerusalem, and Judea that it slowly moved from the Holy of holies to the edge of the temple, then to the edge of the city as if to say, "Can we go back?" But no, the glory was departing in Ezekiel's vision, and soon, of course, the temple would be destroyed and Jerusalem would be destroyed.

God wants His testimony, His lampstand in the church. When He puts all of that work into joining people together, He means for there to be a lampstand there of the testimony that is durable. Nevertheless, there is still the responsibility on the part of Christians who gather together as an assembly to make sure that there remains the light of the testimony of Jesus upon that lampstand.

The Mystery of the Seven Golden Lampstands

In the book of Revelation when it speaks of the mystery of the seven golden lampstands, what does it mean? We find it in Revelation 1:20: "As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." What did John see in that mystery? He was already living a corporate life in the church of Ephesus and the other churches that were there. But here is why the book of Revelation is so precious to us. The Lord wanted to reveal more of Himself to John in order that he might be able to pass the torch of the testimony in these last days under these present circumstances.

The first mystery as I am going to put it comes in Revelation 1—the mystery of the revelation of the churches. What did John see in this mystery of the golden lampstands? This is the mystery of the golden lampstands. The seven golden lampstands are the seven churches. What does that mean? What if I said to you that this was a picture of the church in heaven, of the perfect church we are all going to be a part of one day when Jesus is done working on us. It is the ideal church, the church ready, the invisible church that is glorious, and there it is up in heaven? It seems like a beautiful picture. Is that the way you see it, the church as a golden lampstand? You say, “Yes, one day we will be a golden lampstand.” Well, it is a beautiful picture, but the problem is that is not what is being revealed. Here is what is being revealed.

Jesus is in the Midst of the Seven Golden Lampstands

Those seven churches are surrounding Jesus on the earth and they are golden lampstands already on the earth, not up in heaven. The book of Revelation always makes a very clear distinction between what John sees on earth and what he sees in heaven. He was brought up to heaven to see things up there, but here he was on earth, and he heard a voice and turned around. He was on the earthly island of Patmos; he had not been lifted up to the heavenly island of Patmos. He was in the Spirit and when he heard this voice, he turned around and right behind him on this earth were seven golden lampstands. He is overwhelmed when he sees this mystery. What is being revealed here? It is an unveiling here on earth of the church as it was then and as it is now.

The first thing he saw was the One who is standing in the midst of the seven lampstands. That is what overwhelmed him because he saw Jesus standing in the midst of the seven lampstands here on earth. We talk about Jesus being here in the midst every time two or three are gathered; but supposing you actually saw Him working on the church and you were one of those who was working on the church? Being John the apostle, he had been ministering, working, and doing his best, and suddenly he sees this glorious High Priest Jesus standing in the midst of the churches. It was overwhelming for John to see these things that would change his whole life.

I wonder if we can see the church rightly in its reality unless we see the church with Jesus in the midst. We talk about Jesus being here. I think when you look in the Scriptures and you see the church, you always see Jesus there. Paul never says that the church is the body without saying Christ is the Head. Lance was famous in talking about this headless body that used to walk around. I remember back in the Baptist days we used to have what we called the invocation where we gather everybody together on Sunday morning and say, “Lord, here we are the headless body. We are praying, Lord, that You will come down and squirt Yourself on us, and we will know Your presence today.” So we invoked God to come down as if He were somehow floating up there and we were down here as the body, separate. It was such a noble prayer. It was wonderful if you did it in a real religious way, but it is not a reality. When the church gets together and the folks sit down, the Lord is there in the midst, if it is a reality. Here is a spiritual reality that must be seen in the Spirit.

Would it change your life at all if you realized that Jesus is right here now, if you could see Him with the eyes of the Spirit? Supposing that dream of A.J. Gordon was not just a dream, and every time you gathered Jesus came in the midst to see what was going on. Well, that is

something that John must have seen. But I believe this presence of Jesus in the midst of us is something that we should be more aware of because it will make all the difference in the world whether we are just a wineskin or whether we really have wine. Is the life there? It is Jesus' life. If Jesus' life is not there, then we are just human beings who have gotten together in a social club. But if Jesus *is* there, there is a sudden connection among all of us and the Presence is in our midst who can lead us. So John saw Jesus first of all, and it was enough to make him fall down as a dead man.

What is Our Value of the Assembly We are in?

He also saw this mystery—the seven churches of Asia, but they were all golden lampstands. Now is that what you call your fellowship? What is that assembly like up there in Manhattan where you are meeting, Dana? Ah, it is a golden lampstand. Do you see that? This says all of gold, a golden lampstand, because what John saw to pass along is that the church on earth is already gold. But you say, “Now wait, that is impossible.” The gold in the new Jerusalem somehow has a correspondence with something going on here on the earth that is gold, that is beautiful, it is God-wrought, it is pure, full of Christ. That is the church. Can the church be this heavenly golden glorious thing located here on earth? It is not a question of can; *it is!* That is where we miss it.

Let me put it in another way as an analogy. I told you I confuse things that Lucio made so clear this morning. You know how we live our Christian lives when we begin to take ground and gain in our Christian lives as we realize that the finished work means our salvation is already done, our sanctification is already done. Then we live out of that realization that we are already saved and already a saint. We work that out by the power of the Holy Spirit and the work of the cross on our lives. But if you do not see that perspective, then you think, “Well, I am still a terrible sinner, but I am trying to improve.” You have missed the whole thing of what it means to be crucified and are now living by a whole new life.

We also talk about spiritual battles in this way unless you see that the victory has already been won and you fight out of the victory—not, we are all losing here; we have to do something if we are going to win. But Jesus has already overcome; He has won the victory and we stand in His victory, and then do battle. We all recognize that and acknowledge it; but when it comes to the church, we say, “Well, the church has just fallen way down. Our fellowship is not doing very well; I do not know what the future of this whole thing is going to be. It certainly is not very heavenly or glorious. It is pretty earthy and full of flesh.” How can you possibly build the church when you see that? But what if you saw the church as complete in Jesus Christ? What if you saw her glory as God values her? What if suddenly the valuation of your little assembly was adjusted by God's valuation, mainly that it is a lampstand of gold? That is something that has to happen in a revelation. Otherwise, all you can see is what is on this earth and you do not see too much gold sometimes on this earth.

But I want to suggest to you that John saw this. If you can imagine this: John has been ministering to these seven churches for many years. He has been faithful as an apostle. He has been trying to build the church. He has been a shepherd to them. He has been an evangelist among them. He has been faithfully working. Suddenly he sees that the church is a golden lampstand with Jesus working on it. It is overwhelming when you see that. You realize

immediately how far you have missed the perfection in your observation of what the church really is.

Personal Testimony

I say that because it all came out of my own experience. It was about forty years ago when I first began to see that the church was a lampstand all of gold with Jesus in the midst. When I saw that, I am not sure I could have described what I saw, but I can tell you that as soon as I saw it I knew what I was building was wood, straw, hay, and I knew I was on the wrong track. I was a servant of God; I was a pastor in a church; but because I did not see the church in its reality, I was trying to whip up a bunch of ornery people to go in the same direction that I wanted them to go in. Suddenly, when I saw that the church was gold, I wondered how I could ever have been allowed to put my hands on this thing. I immediately saw my imperfection and the vain attempts of my life to build a human organization. It came just like that. Nobody had to say, "Repent;" it was right there. From that moment on, I have not been able to settle for the imperfect church because that is not in the mind of God. He does not see an imperfect church; therefore, I was no longer one who was going to try to build that compromised church.

All the ministers used to say, "Oh yeah, the church is a wonderful place. It is going to be the bride of Christ one day. But right now it is just imperfect, messed up, no good. And that is the way the church is. Of course, you have divisions; you have this group and that group, fighting each other; that is just people; that is just the church, and it is the way it is always going to be." Well, I am thankful I was arrested by seeing something glorious and trying to minister according to the standard all of gold. What if you see the church is gold and you try to minister by the standard all of gold, where Christ is all and in all, and He is the church?

The Glorious Church is Often Seen as in the Future

When you see the church as God evaluates it, it is a humbling thing. It caused me to repent; I was undone for quite a while. When we sing that song, "I will build My church. I will build My church... 'Tis the glorious church," immediately our minds shift to the future—"without spot or wrinkle." But what if it is a glorious church now? What if you have a lampstand in the midst and you do not realize who you are? It would profoundly change your ministry, your approach, everything about it, and you would see things differently. Actually, when you see that, it becomes a tremendous comfort to you. Can you imagine how comforted John was after first being undone by seeing this revelation when he realized, "Wow! You know what, I am in exile on Patmos, but Somebody better than me is working on the churches right now and it is Jesus. He knows what to say to them. He knows how to trim the wicks. He knows exactly what is going on. He has the perfect eye to see. His ministry is the ministry that is needed—Jesus in the midst."

What if you saw Jesus in the midst of the church working on the church? Do you think you could end up helping out in a more fruitful way? What if we heard what Jesus is saying to His church, wouldn't it be a lot easier to just amen what Jesus is saying rather than making up something of our own? How many guys here who preach the word in your assembly on Saturday night say, "Oh boy, what am I going to share tomorrow? Let's see. What have I been

reading lately?" What if you know what Jesus is saying and you just want to say, "Amen"? Wow, I think that might be a very fruitful speaking ministry. You see the church in all of His glory, you see the church as all of gold, and you are allowed to pound out that gold, but it depends on what you see.

We have a dear brother up in New York, and one time our group was going through some complaining over some things, and I asked my brother, "What do you think about that?" He said, "I am just looking at the gold." What does he mean by that? When you have a gathering of let's say fifty people, we do not know exactly who is there, but there is some gold, and you keep looking at the gold. That is what this brother said, he is looking at the gold. I like that.

How Will the Lord Perfect the Church?

Then, as John was watching Jesus, a second mystery was revealed. Not only was the church a golden lampstand, but the second thing was as he looked at the situation: How will the Lord perfect these churches in Revelation 2-3 that are going through various problems? John saw this lack in the churches, and now he had the chance to watch Jesus and see the way He ministered to these churches. If John is clever enough, he will watch Jesus and begin to understand the way the church needs to be ministered to. So he watched the Lord who so mercifully came to each church and commended them for the things they were doing as an expression of His life and as an act of faith. But before the Lord rebuked them, He showed a certain part of His character to each church. Then He said, "Repent. Do you see this? Do you see what you are doing? Repent."

Do you know the problem in the church at Pergamos? He said, "I have this against you; you are holding to the teachings of Balaam and to the teaching of the Nicolaitans." Who is the church supposed to be holding to? Their Head, Jesus Christ, not to some teaching whether Balaam, Nicolaitan or something else. The church does not hold on to teachings; the church holds on to its Head, Christ. Jesus comes to rebuke them and says, "Now you are holding on to these teachings, and I do not want you to hold on to them; I want you to hold on to Me." He comes to them as, "Here I am the sharp two-edged sword." Here is the Word of God, the real Word of God; repent of holding to the teachings. I am the living Word of God. I am the two-edged sword. He revealed Himself as the living Word. When you see that, you repent of holding to some doctrine.

Sardis was a church that had fallen asleep, as Jesus said to them. They left things half-done. As a matter of fact, there are things that might even suffer death in their midst. But how does He come to them? He did not come to them and say, "You are dead and asleep." He says, "I come to you as the seven spirits of God." Basically, He comes with the fullness of the Holy Spirit. He says, "What is this deadliness, sleepiness, leaving things half done? Be filled with the Spirit. Do you see who I am? I am the Spirit of life. I quicken. You should not be falling asleep."

So when you see who He is, you understand what needs to happen. John saw how Jesus did these things as He was among the churches. And having seen the Lord's method, John began to understand even more importantly how you minister in the last days to the church. How do you minister in the last days to the church? If we follow Jesus' example, we will realize what He does. Jesus speaks to the whole church. When He sees His testimony flickering on the

lampstand, He speaks to the church and calls everyone to overcome. Jesus preached to the overcomers in the whole church and called for them to overcome.

When the flame of this golden lampstand is flickering and even going out, the Lord says, "Who is willing to stand up with the torch? Who is willing to take the torch and hold it up high, hold Jesus up high? Maybe that candlestick can be relit. Who is willing to hold it up in a time when that flame is going dark?" The testimony of Jesus involves not just the corporate, but also the individual. It is actually the net light that comes when brothers and sisters hold the torch and stand together. And when the corporate is flagging, it is time for ones to stand up and testify of the fullness of Jesus and the life of Jesus in the midst of that which is growing dark. And for that there needs to be overcomers to seize the torch by faith and hold it up in the last days. Seeing the Lord and hearing what He said was caught by John, and we see in Jesus the example for us as well.

Wherever we are, whatever fellowship we are in, whatever church we happen to attend at the time, if we hear Jesus call then we have to hold up the torch of the testimony even as an individual paying the price that others may see His reality. When we minister to saints, you are to be gracious, and you commend the church for what they have done by the life of Christ in real faith. There are many churches that are having real problems in this matter, but they have been faithful and the Lord commends them. Even in some churches like Thyatira, the Lord really commends them for those things that they have done out of faithfulness. But then also in His mercy, as we hold up the torch of the testimony, He rebukes whatever the disobedience is or the heart attitude or the breach in the church life that the enemy has come into.

There is something usually at the heart of every assembly that is causing problems with the testimony of Jesus. There may be many problems. Corinth had many problems, but Jesus was able to discern that one matter at the heart of the life of the church that was causing it to be compromised and having problems with the testimony of Jesus.

The Torch of the Testimony is Passed on to Overcoming Bondservants

At the very beginning of Revelation chapter 1, we see a way we are to minister in these days. Only the Lord can raise up somebody to carry the torch of the testimony. And we see in Revelation 1:1-3, the torch has to be passed on to bondservants who are willing to overcome. In one sense, man cannot actually pass the torch. If you are bearing the torch, you cannot just say, "Here. Take it." Only the Spirit can pass the torch from one to another. Listen to what Revelation 1:3 says, "Blessed are those who read and hear the word (but not all hear)." Jesus spoke to those seven churches, and John wrote the letter. In the church of Laodicea he says, "You are lukewarm, and I am going to spit you out of My mouth because you think you are rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing." Now everybody heard what was read, but how many heard what the Spirit was saying? We wish everybody would hear what the Spirit is saying, but some people said, "No, we are not like that; we are a good church." Some people talk back to Jesus. When He says, "You are this," they say, "No, we are not." So not everybody who reads these letters are going to hear. Jesus said, "Let him who has an ear hear what the Spirit is saying."

Then in Revelation 1:3, it says, "Not only do we need to hear it, but we need to heed [obey] it." There are some who read and do not hear. There are some who read and hear, but they do

not obey. But to His bondservants, and how can we tell who His bondservants are? When it is read, they hear it, and when they hear it, they obey it and repent, and the testimony is restored. They are the overcomers who are willing to repent and do what is right. So the mystery remains—many are called, few are chosen. This book of the revelation of Jesus Christ is so clear. The message to the seven churches is very clear, but we need ears to hear, then if we hear, we need to obey the word that we hear. So bondservants, today in these last days, if you are going to hold up the torch of the testimony, you have to hold up and confess the truth of the church in all its glory with the Lord Jesus in the midst. When we talk to the church, whether it is commendation or rebuke, it has to be done with the revelation of Jesus Christ before His people. It cannot be just rebukes and exhortations made without that vision before them so those who will see will see.

There was a famous preacher one time who listened to a young guy who had a lot of fire in his preaching. He was all fired up, and when he got through preaching, he asked this older pastor what he thought of the message. The guy said, “You know, boy, you have to decide whether you want to feed the sheep or club the goats.” What we need to do in this day is not beat on everybody; what we need to do is show them the revelation of Jesus Christ, bear that testimony of reality in our lives and in the word that we proclaim. And when they see that revelation, then they can be adjusted as they are forged into this golden lampstand.

The Mystery of the Overcomers

What is this mystery of the overcomers? As soon as we talk about the church, then we see the ministry to the church and we see an overcomer rising up. How can an ordinary saint overcome? I think some of you overcome, but I think some of you have no idea what that is. However, the testimony of Jesus needs to be held up, and when it is held up, you see. When you read the testimony of Jesus, you see; you hear. How can I tell that you saw the golden lampstand? I cannot tell just by looking at you, but if you have seen it, you have been undone by it. If you have seen it, you have repented. If you have seen it, you have been adjusted by it. If it is just a theory, you can just go on your own way; but the first thing is that when you see it, it is awesome. Our brother Lucio was sharing the awesome thing of the size of God. If we really see that size of Jesus, it causes us to repent for the little Jesus we have been hanging on to.

When that testimony is fully born in front of us, not only do we repent, and the Bible likes this two-handed method where you repent and then exercise faith. Faith lays hold of the reality that you have seen. So you say, “I have seen it.” “Well, what have you seen?” “The church in all her glory with Jesus in the midst; I have seen her.” People say, “What, are you crazy?” Once you have seen it, you confess by faith what you have seen. It is so important to do that. Wouldn't it be a whole other thing if people heard the confession out of our mouths? Not a negative testimony—“Oh, we are hopelessly flawed. We are gathered in an earthly organization, and we will never be perfect until one day when Jesus does some magic. We have all been carnal and not grown a bit. But one day: presto! change-o! we are all perfect! We are the beautiful bride. But until then we are just flawed down here on earth.” Now is that what you think about the church? Is that what you confess about the church?

Our Confession Needs to be a Positive Testimony

No, I think the confession is to be a positive testimony. We say, "The church is all of gold. I am in the church and it is all of gold." As soon as you say that, because you know yourself, a couple of things have to happen. If you are going to confess the testimony that the church is all of gold, that is what Jesus sees, this is what God desires, that is what is here on earth for the present time, immediately two things happen. One is you have to be under the blood of the Lamb. If you are going to confess that the church is a glorious church, you can only do that under the blood of the Lamb because we are imperfect. If we say that and then we say, "Here I am in the full flesh as part of it," we are in trouble. If you see the glorious church, you realize that the only way you can be part of it is under the blood. And then you see that the only way you can be a part of it is when you stop loving your life even unto death. If you really see the golden church, you say, "Lord, whatever it takes for that golden church to be a reality in my life." You are willing to lay down your soul-life and those things that are causing division between you and sister so and so because I am going to stand in reality.

If you say you are standing in the reality of a glorious church, a) you have to stand under the blood; b) you love not your life even unto death. That is how the overcomer develops.

Revelation 12:11: "They overcame by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of their testimony, and they loved not their lives even unto death."

It is a positive testimony about what you have seen and what the church really is. The church is not a flawed organization. You may see that all around you, but that is not the church. The church is a golden lampstand that has been pounded out by God into one piece to bear the testimony of Jesus and that is our confession.

The Consequences of Taking up the Torch of the Testimony

Finally if you are willing to take up the torch of the testimony, what will happen? If you are willing to stand up and say I have seen and testify to the reality of Jesus Christ and His church, what will happen? If you stand with the torch of the testimony, what will happen?

1) If you stand as a witness to the truth of Christ and His church, the Lord will stand with you.

2) The Lord may sovereignly join you to others who are bearing the same torch and begin to forge a lampstand all of gold.

3) Those around you who may be in the darkness of compromise, because you stood up and held up the torch of the testimony, may repent and the church will be revived and recovered in her flame and testimony.

We do not know what happened subsequently of Jesus speaking these things to the seven churches. Let's just say as an example that somebody or a few people in the church in Pergamum truly repented of holding on to anything but Jesus. And they confessed, "Our life is Christ. Our truth is Christ. We hold fast to our Head, and we do not hold to teachings. We hold on to Christ." They stand in that light, and the reality of Christ and the truth of what they say burns like a light in their lives. Others in Pergamum must say, "Wow, that is right." Then they repent and the church can be recovered.

There have been well-known cases where a young person has stood up with the torch of the testimony of Jesus and brought a whole church to their knees. Are you willing to stand up and bear that testimony?

We also need to remember that there are many people around us who are Christians, who love the Lord, who are serving the Lord in the measure of light that they have, and because they are truly serving the Lord, they would love to be led in the more perfect way. They would love to meet Aquila and Priscilla and find out the testimony of the church. They would love to meet you with the torch of the testimony. They would see and then they would have to decide what to do. But there are so many around us, and they are not all against us. There are many who really love the Lord, but they have never seen that torch of the testimony of Jesus Christ in His church. Wonderful testimony!

Bringing Our Young People Back

The last thing is, and you know this has been a prayer in my heart for many years, that our young people would come back. Our sons and daughters have gone out to many places to tribes on the other side of the Jordan and there are some who have stopped attending anywhere. If our assemblies can truly bear the testimony of Jesus in its lampstand, I think some would come back. I have seen in recent days people who have left a number of years ago seem to be trickling back. Sometimes you have to go out and try many different things before you come back to appreciate the reality of the testimony of Jesus in the assembly. It may be a simple thing, but it is life and it is true, and Jesus is there. These are the last days; it is time for us to overcome. Who hears what I am saying? Who will heed what they hear? Who will stand up with the torch of the testimony?

Many times in a young people's group, all the young people are down in the dumps, and then one young person gets hold of the Lord and lifts that torch of the testimony up in the air, one by one the young people come back to life. It just took one young person. When we gathered in Richmond in the old days, I used to work with the young people, and sometimes we would have seventy-five teenagers all bent on rebellion. We would pray before the meetings, whoever was working with me: "Lord, raise up one or two. Just raise up one or two." When those one or two were raised up and repented and got right, the others fell like dominos. But they just needed to see someone with that torch of the testimony up in the air.

The Lord is calling us to be overcomers in these last days. If you have to stand individually, God bless you. Maybe the Lord will lead you with others who are standing holding the torch of the testimony. The Lord wants us to be faithful. So to me here is the beautiful thing. John was faithful, and he learned how to pass the torch of the testimony to us to read, hear, and obey.

Lord, we pray that You will help us even as we think about these things. Lord, I do not want us to be too mystical about it, but we do pray that Your presence will truly be upon us in these days. We believe Your Spirit is deeply working upon our lives and trying to show us the more perfect way. Lord, help us to confess what is true and not confess what is false about ourselves or about the state of the church. Help us to see the church as You see it. Help us to agree with that and get under the blood and have Your cross work upon our lives so that we can work out that which we have seen. Lord, this is something only You can do by Your Holy Spirit. But even

now would You raise up overcomers by the power of Your Spirit who are willing to stand against the tide of compromise and darkness and stand in the light of the truth and bear the testimony. These things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.