

The Testimony of Jesus

We are thankful we can continue in the Lord's presence today. I would like to start our time and read some verses that we are familiar with in Matthew 16. We have been talking about the Lord's promises today, and this is another one of His great promises that we can stand on and believe, and see what He is doing.

Matthew 16:16: "Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.'"

Let's pray:

Lord, we are thankful for all of Your precious and magnificent promises. We are thankful how they are fulfilled in You. You are the very promise indeed, and we are thankful, Lord, how the promise of Your presence continues with us, and by faith we want to stand into all that You have for us. Lord, we are thankful that You are Lord and Head over this time. And we are thankful that we can boast in You, and that You will keep out anything that would try to compete for our attention. We want the eyes of our hearts focused upon You that we could see and behold You in the fullness and glory of Your resurrection life. In Jesus' name. Amen.

I am starting a series on this matter of the testimony of Jesus throughout church history. We have the promise in Matthew 16 of how the Lord revealed Christ to Peter, and He then gave him a further revelation of seeing that upon this rock I will build My church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. Recently, John spoke about the contrast between our natural eyes and our spiritual eyes, those eyes of faith. If we look around with our natural eyes, we wonder how it will ever occur. But we are thankful that as we see with the eyes of faith and keep our eyes upon Him, we recognize that He is doing a great work.

I want to consider this matter of the testimony of Jesus throughout church history as a matter of encouraging us. There are so many things in this day that would discourage us and many things that would raise questions. However, we are thankful as we look back and see the great faithfulness of the Lord, the great continual work that He has been doing, that we can be encouraged to be strengthened to press on. Now we are obviously not going to be doing a detailed study of church history; we will just be looking at a bird's eye view of it. Today we will be looking at an introduction, presenting the time and setting of what we will be looking at in the following times.

Why Consider Church History?

As we begin today, I have some verses out of Ecclesiastes that will answer the question of why we even need to stop and consider church history. These verses out of Ecclesiastes really help us to put things in perspective because so often we judge things by the present time, and so often even in the current age many people have said 2020 is the worst year ever. In all of history 2020 is the worst year. In our lives and experiences that is true, but if you keep it in perspective

of the worst year ever it does not quite qualify. I am not saying it was not a bad year, but it is a matter of perspective.

Ecclesiastes 1:9-11 says, "That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. So, there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one might say, 'See this, is it new?' Already, it has existed for ages which were before us. There is no remembrance of earlier things, and of the latter things which will occur, there will be for them no remembrance among those who will come later still."

There is Nothing New Under the Sun

There is nothing new under the sun. As we look at these verses, we see how so often we think things are new, but there is really nothing new. It is just that we do not remember. We do not reflect back on history, and that is why we want to look at a perspective as we look at these next few verses. The question is: Are we living under the sun or under heaven? Under the sun is the natural eye that John was speaking about, and under heaven is the eye of faith, seeing it from His perspective. The second wisest man who ever lived is writing this.

Ecclesiastes 1:12-14: "I the preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with. I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind."

Are We Living under the Sun or Under Heaven?

If in our lives we are looking at things under the sun from that natural perspective, it is very discouraging, disappointing, despairing and hopeless. If we were focusing upon church history and looking at the condition of the church, not many of us would be celebrating and joyous. It really does bring us to a point of despair, and there is a sadness about the overall outward condition. But if we see things under the heaven, if we are living under the heaven under His throne, we will be encouraged. We have been sharing at various times in prayer meetings and on Sunday of those times in Matthew 24 and Luke 21 which are terrible times, but the encouragement is to look up, get our perspective changed to look up. If we can keep our eyes upon the Lord, we can be encouraged and strengthened to press on, and we will see that hope set before us.

Why Consider the Testimony of Jesus in Church History?

Sometimes when you look back through history, you say, "What was God doing during the dark ages?" If we are looking with our natural eyes, we do not see Him, but if the eyes of our heart can be enlightened, we will see the testimony of Jesus throughout history, and we will see His great faithfulness there. That is one of the reasons we are considering the testimony of Jesus in church history. We will see His faithfulness and the continuity of God and His purpose. He has been doing only one thing continually from eternity past through eternity future. He has been doing one thing with one purpose, and it is all related to the testimony of Jesus and to His bride making herself ready. As we see that, it again encourages us greatly. We also see our great

heritage. We know in the days we are living in many people are looking at their history and heritage in all the websites of ancestry, but this is a glimpse into that, and we will not even charge you for it. The ancestry we have goes farther back than ancestry.com.

We see the great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, and we see faithful ones throughout many generations which encourage us to be faithful in our generation. When we hear of ones who have endured through various trials and sufferings all by the grace of God, it encourages us to press on. It enables us to be the testimony He has called us to be and faithful in this generation. It keeps, what I call, our special walk and perspective balanced if we do not think too high of ourselves or too low of ourselves. What are we saying here?

We have been called with an on-high calling. We have a very special walk with the Lord, a very precious walk that He has called us to. But we need to keep it in perspective. We can start thinking too high of ourselves. All of a sudden, we can think this is unique. Wow! What we are going through is unique; we are so much better. As we look around, we can think we are better; we are it. However, as you look through history, God has been doing this great work, the same work throughout the generations. It is very precious; it is very special, but it is not something unique to our generation. It is unique in time overall, yes; it is a great unique work, but within our generation it is not unique; it has always been going on. Therefore, we do not need to think too high. On the other hand, we do not need to think too low of it and consider that this is just the way church has been going on for these two thousand years. Everybody meets wherever they want to and however they want to. We go on and do not recognize the preciousness of what we have been called into. He loved the church so much that He died for it. In Ephesians He talks about His love for us and His willingness to die for the church. May we not think too high or too low of it, and may the Lord keep us in balance and our perspective right.

We also see through history that it is really His story. It is His testimony of who He is, of all that He has done, and all that He is doing, and we are very grateful for that. We see particularly from these verses in Ecclesiastes that there is nothing new under the sun. What has been will continue to be.

As we look through history, we find that it is easy to get the facts, but we want to learn the lessons. Kenny prayed before the meeting today that we can see the acts of God, but do we know the ways of God? We are looking for the ways of God. One of the reasons I am using overheads as we go through this outline is to show the facts. You can get them, but we want to be focusing upon the lessons and learning the ways of God in a greater and fuller way.

Nothing New under the Sun

As we mentioned, there is nothing new under the sun. What I am doing is comparing today and what we are going through, the time that we are living in with what was going on during the time of our Lord Jesus when He was upon this earth. I picked some things here that seem to be major issues during our time related to abortion, same sex marriage, pandemics, social and racial injustices, unjust governments. As we look back, we see these same things. It does not make what we are going through any less intense or severe, but we see again it is not unique. We realize in these days and the closer we get to the Lord's return, lawlessness is abounding. There

is an intensity that is growing. It is like evil has been let loose. I am not trying to minimize what we are going through, but we realize that throughout the ages, others have been going through very intense situations also.

There is a special intensity about this time, and we are going to look at each of these conditions we are facing. We are not going to look at social injustice or racial inequality today. It is more for next time because this great social injustice and great racial inequality occurred during the time our Lord was upon this earth under the Roman Empire, and that was the thing that challenged the Roman Empire the most. The teachings of Christ and the quality of a man and a woman loving one another is still the answer today. Therefore, we are not going to look at it today, but we will look at it the next time.

Abortion & the Early Church

As you look at this matter of abortion, sometimes we can think this is a 20th century issue. However, there was abortion going on in the first century. This is some of the writings that we have that comes out of the Didache: "You shall not procure an abortion, nor destroy a newborn child" (Didache 2:1-2 A.D. 70). Didache means teachings, and it was a compilation of writings during the first century of various writers. Some say they were by the apostles, others say they were not, and there are still debates over who wrote it. But it is a compilation, and it deals with some major issues that the church was facing at that point in time. It starts off on the ways of life, some principles of life and death, and it really parallels the Sermon on the Mount. Also, it deals with the practices of rituals at that time--baptism, the Lord's table, fasting, some guidance for believers, and dealing with church order and church government. So this was a document that was written during that time that was available to the believers.

Note that it says, "You shall not procure an abortion or destroy a newborn child." What would occur a lot of times if the person did not have an abortion, they would just kill the child on birth if they did not want it. They were very brutal in that day and time as you can imagine. The third option was that they would sell it for prostitution. There were these so-called schools that would buy babies and raise them up to be prostitutes. It was not a very healthy environment. However, there were these teachings that were going on as different ones were getting converted. We see this letter of Barnabas (not Barnabas in the Scriptures), which says, "Thou shall not slay the child by procuring abortion; nor, again, shalt thou destroy it after it is born" (Letter of Barnabas 19, A.D. 741).

Then there are the Tertullian's writings later on in A.D. 197: "We may not destroy even the fetus in the womb ...To hinder a birth is merely a speedier man-killing; nor does it matter whether you take away a life that is born or destroy one that is coming to birth. *That is a man which is going to be one.*" Even back then they recognized that an unborn child was a man to be, a person to be. These are things that the church, the testimony of the Lord, has been battling for centuries, and we are still battling today, and we continue to stand for His righteousness.

Homosexuality & Same Sex Marriage

When we consider homosexuality and same sex marriage, during the Roman Empire time it was pitiful. The homosexuality, the sexual promiscuity, even pedophilia were all accepted by

Rome. There were no guidelines. Later on some laws were passed, but it continued to be rampant. The immorality within the Roman Empire was one of the things that ended up bringing it down. There were several factors that brought the Roman Empire down, and promiscuity was one of them that ended up destroying that great empire. We see the same thing going on in the world today, even in our country. The promiscuity and all of these things are continuing to increase, and it is destroying us. Again, there is nothing new under the sun.

In same sex marriages, the Emperor Nero, whom we hear of often because he was there during the New Testament times, was one of the first public figures to enter into a same sex marriage. He married two different guys. His first one was in A. D. 64 and he married Pythagoras. Nero dressed as the bride; he played the role of the so-called wife. It is sad. Later on, after he got rid of that one, he married a young boy, Sporus, and dressed him as the bride. It is so sad. In one way I hate saying these things, but I think we need to know. These conditions were going on when our Lord was upon the earth and when the New Testament was written. This was the great battle.

Pandemics

We also are aware of the pandemic that is going on. There have been some very horrendous pandemics throughout the ages. One of them was during the period of the early church in the Roman Empire, the Antonian one. They are not sure what that was; it may have been smallpox. Probably the one that most people are familiar with is the Black Death, the huge one that occurred through the bubonic plague. They did not have great record keeping back then so there have been various estimates. The estimates range from 75 million to 200 million people who died. It was roughly a third of Europe and part of North Africa and Eurasia were wiped out. That is hard to even fathom, but praise God, during that time there were faithful believers that were not caring about their own lives. They were caring about others and reaching out to those ones who were sick, and literally, many of them were laying down their lives. They lost their lives to serve others. There are precious testimonies that have come out of that time. And we know there have been other pandemics that have occurred, and we are living through one right now which is really sad.

Unjust Governments in the First Century

The unjust governments in the first century which were under the Roman Emperors and were there during the time of the New Testament writings--Nero, Vespasian, Titus and Domitian. The New Testament books that were written were familiar with Nero because he blamed the Christians for the burning of Rome which was the first persecution. Now that was not an empire-wide persecution. It was restricted within the Rome and Italy regions. The empire-wide persecution did not begin for another hundred and fifty years. But there were sporadic persecutions throughout the empire at various times. Vespasian was the one who ordered the temple in Jerusalem to be destroyed, but His son, Titus actually destroyed the temple. We do not know the exact dating of the book of Hebrews, but we know it was before the destruction of Jerusalem during either Nero or Vespasian's time. Another one we are familiar with is Domitian. He was the one who had imprisoned John on the Isle of Patmos, and that was one of the more

widespread persecutions of believers, although it was still not fully throughout the whole empire. So we can see how these were the conditions that the dear ones were living under.

Paul's Writings Under Nero

Jerry mentioned Wednesday night at the prayer meeting that when you think of Paul's writings during the time of Nero it is interesting that in A. D. 1301 it says, "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. There is no authority except from God, those which exist or are established by God. The one we are very familiar with is in I Timothy 2:1: "First of all things, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity."

As those verses continue, we see that it is for the sake of the gospel. He does not want anyone to perish. To me it is quite a contrast when you see the environment that these brothers and sisters were living in and the instructions of how the Lord, through the apostles, were telling them how to react and how to respond during these times. It is a great contrast, and I think there is a lot for us to learn in the days we are living in about that.

Peter's Writings

Also we see in Peter's writings. Again, under Nero's rule he says in I Peter 2:13-14,17: "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king or emperor as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him...Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king or emperor."

That is the role of us as believers. That is our attitude towards every human institution, honoring the king and the governors, ones who are set over us. We do not have to agree with them, but there is a respect and an honor that we must give to them, and we need to be considering that.

Now all of this was shared for a perspective that as we start looking through history we would be reminded of the days and times and what they were like back then. So often, I am sorry to say, that is probably one of the great downfalls of the cancel culture today. Everybody is judging the past through what we see today and today's standards. It does not mean that the things in the past were done right, but many of them were done because it was the way things were done back then. It does not make it right or wrong, but we are rejudging things, and it is sad. Also, we will see that throughout church history as ones were following the Lord, they would have a little light. They did not have some of the full revelation of things we see, but they were faithful to the little bit of light they had, and the Lord honored that. He encouraged them in that way, and He blessed them. So all of this is for us to get a perspective.

The Birth of the Church

As we move now into the history of the church, we have the birth of the church. One brother who could not be with us today said, "Mac, the history of the church goes before A.D. 33." And it does because it was predetermined before the foundation of the world. This has always been upon God's heart and His desire. It is not a New Testament concept either. As you look

throughout the Old Testament God has always had that desire for a people to express His life. Through Abraham a family had been raised up, and through Moses we find a nation that was raised up. That nation and that family were to express the life of the Lord.

Then, through David a kingdom came in that was to display the life of the Lord. Even Adam and Eve is a picture of Christ and the church. So we see that this is not something New Testament that was created by man after some point in time. This was the origin of the church, and it came from God not man. We know that the church was birthed through Christ's travail on the cross. Praise God, through the spiritual realm the church was birthed through Christ's travail on the cross, and church on earth began in the book of Acts. We are thankful for the day of Pentecost when those 120 individuals were baptized into one body, and in Acts 1 we find it is the church of the living Christ.

The Early Church

Acts 1:1: "The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach."

The book of Acts shows us all that He continues to do and teach. And we know that the book of Acts has not ended yet. Praise God, He is continuing to do things; He is continuing to teach, and we are thankful for that.

Thank the Lord, the church had a good, healthy birth. We know from the very beginning that there was a rich testimony there. In spite of the problems and different situations, it shows we are never sinless perfect. But in spite of those things, we see how the Lord continued to grow and manifest Himself through Peter and John when they got arrested, but praise God they kept going on. They had the problem of Ananias and Sapphira, but praise God, the church kept going on. There were the Hellenistic widows which created a problem, but praise God, it kept going on. Through all those issues there is a Scripture in the context of that story that says, "And the church grew and was strengthened. Many were added to their midst." And it was through those situations.

We are thankful how it continued to spread out to Antioch to the Gentiles. Why did it spread and end up being in Antioch? It was really through persecution. The Lord had told them to go throughout every place and spread the gospel, but they were so happy in Jerusalem that they just stayed there. Thus He had to bring a little persecution to them in order to drive some of them out. It was through the persecution that different ones ended up sharing the gospel with the Gentiles and then how they were brought into the church.

From the Roman Empire perspective, Christians at that point were considered a sect of Judaism. That was the way it was looked upon at that time. Then in AD 64 Nero burned Rome and blamed the Christians for it. In AD 70 the temple was destroyed; therefore, there was no earthly center, and after that there was a great distinction between Judaism and Christianity. Now Judaism was still authorized by Rome, but Christianity was not authorized. It was not illegal yet to be a Christian, but it was not a recognized religion. Throughout the Roman Empire they had certain recognized religions. Even though Christianity was not illegal at this point, it was not recognized. Therefore, since they were not recognized they did not have some of the protections

those under Judaism would have had. Finally, around AD 90 the time came when the Christians were actually barred from going to the synagogues. The split between Judaism and Christianity grew, and there was a revolt that said believers could not enter Jerusalem, and because of that the Jews said they could not go into the synagogues anymore. So this separation was continuing to grow.

Why is the Testimony of Jesus so Vital?

I have been using this phrase “the testimony of Jesus”, and why is this testimony of Jesus so vital? It is because it is the key to everything that God is doing. When you look throughout Scripture, how does God ever start something fresh? How does He ever start something? How does He renew something? How does He recover? How does He strengthen His people? It is by that new, fresh and greater revelation of Jesus Christ. It is an unveiling of Jesus Christ. That is the answer to every issue throughout the Scripture. That is what He does. Even in the Old Testament, how did He capture Abraham? The God of glory appeared to him. When Joshua went into the Promised Land, what did he see? He saw the Lord, the Captain of the Lord of Hosts. When Isaiah was facing that challenging time after Uzziah died, what was the answer for him? “I saw the Lord seated upon the throne high and lifted up, and His glory was filling the temple.” Jesus Christ came in, and there was the answer to encouragement for Isaiah.

When we come to the New Testament, I think about those verses we read in Matthew 16:17. How did Peter see what he saw? The Lord says very clearly, “Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” There was revelation of the Lord Jesus.

Paul tells us in Galatians how the Lord was pleased to reveal Christ in him. And brothers and sisters, “He is pleased to reveal His Son in us.” We see how the Lord is pleased to reveal His Son in us, but somehow when we talk of this word revelation, it can be intimidating sometimes. We think, “Oh, that is for a special group of people.” But the Lord has revealed Himself to each and every one of us. That is why we took the table; we have experienced the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, and He is desiring to reveal His Son to us and in us more and more. Revelation should not be something with a mystique about it or anything like that. When we talk about revelation and revealing, it should be a normal daily experience as we are in the Word. Ben was doing his devotions and that word leaped out to him. That was a revelation of Jesus Christ in the book of Numbers.

As we go through our Friday night studies, we had a review this past Friday night and ones were sharing different verses of how the Lord revealed Himself. In one way, let’s take the mystique of this word revelation and bring it down to everyday life because it pleased Him to give Paul a revelation, to give us a revelation of Jesus Christ so that we won’t be intimidated by the Word. This should be a part of our normal daily Christian life of Christ being revealed to us.

In the book of Hebrews, we read that they were getting ready to go through a tremendous shaking. It is mentioned several times how that shaking was getting ready to come, and how did he encourage those believers to go through? He said, “Consider Jesus.” There are a lot of other ways he refers to the Lord during that book, but it is a refocusing upon Him.

Then we come to the book of Revelation. What is the book of Revelation? It is the unveiling, the revelation, the revealing of Jesus Christ. He reveals His Son to us because the time is near. That time is at hand. Therefore, we really need to be praying in this day and time for the Lord to reveal more of His Son, Jesus Christ to us. This is our prayer that it would be a greater revelation, a greater revealing of Him. The more we see of Him the more we are strengthened by Him. Seeing more of Him is what He is after. He is after the life of His Son to be expressed in His people.

What is the Testimony of Jesus?

When we talk about the testimony of Jesus, what is it? What is the testimony of Jesus? Whenever we want to hear of a testimony, we should go to the person and listen to what they say about themselves. The I AM says this. They asked John the Baptist who he was, and he said, "I am simply a voice of one crying in the wilderness." And that is who he was. In Revelation chapter 1, the Lord tells us Who He is, and He speaks of His testimony. It is a testimony of who He is. I appreciated how brother Kaung in his book the "Key to Revelation" summarizes this. As I looked at it in different ways, it is probably the clearest way that I could understand it. It made sense to me, so I borrowed this from him.

In Revelation 1:17-18 this is the apostle John speaking: "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He laid His right hand upon me saying, 'Do not be afraid, I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever more, and I have the keys of death and Hades,'"

Jesus is testifying of Himself of Who He is. He says, "I am the first and the last." That does not mean He is just the beginning and just the end, for He is the all-inclusive One, everything in between. Look at all of the I AMs in the Scripture. The I AMs are not just limited to the gospel of John, but all throughout Scripture we find God saying Who He is, but praise God, He is that all-inclusive One. How do you describe Him? He is all and in all! Praise God for that!

He says, "I am the living One." He is life; He is our very life, our character and nature, and this is what He is jealous for. He says, "I was dead and behold I am alive for evermore and have the keys of death and Hades." He is the all victorious One. He won that great victory at Calvary, and He is winning the victory every day in our lives. We know there will be the consummation of that victory ahead, and that is a sure thing. We have talked about the promises of God which are 'yes' and 'amen' in Him. There will be that consummation of the ages when everything is summed up in Christ. Praise God. This is who He is.

In my own words I have put it like this. This says who He is, His character and nature, what He has done and what He is doing. To me that is the testimony of Jesus of Who He is. He is all-inclusive, He is everything, He is all in all. His character and nature are His very life. Then we see all that He has done and is doing, and it is always done in victory. Praise God for that!

Seeing the Testimony of Jesus in Church History

As we see all of Who He is, we can understand how He desires that His life would be expressed through His people throughout history. In one of Brother Sparks' writings, he defined the word testimony which is used throughout Scripture. He says, "Testimony is that which God

wants to be displayed or seen.” It is not just a mental thing, a creed, a doctrine or a system, but it is His life in His people. That is what God is jealous for, and this testimony of Jesus has been entrusted to the church. The church is to be the vessel to keep, to guard, and to display the testimony of Jesus.

Revelation 1 is the picture of the candlesticks, and the Lord was among them. The candlesticks were the churches, but there is a light on top of the candlesticks. The candlesticks simply hold the light which is what it was created for. As the people of God, the Lord is looking for His testimony among those seven churches; He is looking for the testimony of His life. That is what He is jealous for. We need to pray that more and more of the reality of the testimony of the life of Jesus would be seen in our daily lives.

As we look at the book of Revelation and that great prophecy which says, “John was on the Isle of Patmos.” Why was he there? He was there because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I thought that was so unique that he was not on the Isle of Patmos because of the Word of God and the church. I am not trying to diminish the church, but it was the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus; that is what he was after. We need to pray for a fuller and greater revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ because it was when Peter saw the Lord, the Lord revealed the church.

Brothers and sisters, if we want to see more and more of the church, His body, we need to pray for a greater revelation of Jesus Christ because if you are looking for the church, you can find a doctrine, a system, an organization and miss the Lord. You might not, but you could miss the Lord. However, if you look for Christ and a greater revelation of Him, you will see Him, and He will show you His body which is the church. Our eyes are fixed upon Him, and that is what we need to be diligently pursuing. Sadly, throughout church history we find there is a great difference between this testimony of Jesus and the outward thing called the church or Christendom or Christianity. Fortunately, at the very beginning we find there was the oneness, but even at the end of the New Testament it was beginning to deteriorate; therefore, we need to have the eyes of our hearts opened.

Fruit of the Testimony of Jesus in His people

As we see the fruit of the testimony of Jesus in His people throughout history, we will find to one degree or another these seven things manifested, and they are all about Jesus. In every move of the Lord, you will find these things working in various degrees, some more, some less, but they are all speaking of our Lord Jesus Christ. You will see that the Lord Jesus is the living Head Who will be seen in every believer’s life. You do not see a man, you do not see a teaching, you do not see some organization or tradition, but it will be His life in a very practical way manifested in the people of God. Praise God for that!

Then you will find that the Holy Spirit was given His rightful place and He had a freedom. Now what is the role of the Holy Spirit? The role of the Holy Spirit in us is for Christ to be formed in us. The Holy Spirit is there to do a transforming work within us. The Holy Spirit is there to lead us to the Lord in all His ways. The Holy Spirit is the shyest individual within the Trinity. The Person

of the Holy Spirit never wants us to focus our eyes upon Him. He says, “Don’t look at Me; look at the Son. Look at the Lord’s Son.” He is jealous for that.

Then we will also see the Word of God as the sole authority. Praise God for that because He is the living Word. The Word of God became flesh. The Word of God is not separate from Christ. He *is* the living Word, and we see Him there. It all comes back to the Lord.

We will see the functioning of the priesthood of all believers. This occurs when they recognize who our great High Priest is, and they are operating under the direction of the great High Priest. Praise God!

We also see the love of the brethren manifested in word and deed. Jerry shared recently on this matter of first love and the great love of the brethren. It is because we realize that He first loved us; therefore, we are to love one another. It is not only just in word but in deeds, and in action, in life. This is what He is jealous for.

Then we also see the cross working daily in believers’ lives. And why does the cross work in our lives? The cross is essential in our lives because we see that I must decrease, and He must increase. The more the cross works in us, there is less of us seen and there is more of Christ. It all leads to the testimony of His life in His people.

Separation from the World and Unto Him

Then there is a separation from the world and unto Him. Praise God for that! There is a distinction that occurs, that comes, that draws us unto Himself, and this is what we are jealous for. This whole matter of separation from the world and unto Him is a continual battle because we see that in this separation from the world there is an on-going tension between two extremes. There are two extremes of thought out from John’s teachings. There is one that says, “in the world but not of the world.” And throughout history we will find that if one is focused on ‘in the world,’ the testimony starts to lose its identity and there is no distinction. But if one focuses on ‘not of the world,’ the testimony becomes irrelevant.

Now I appreciated how A. T. Pierson, a dear brother who shared about this said, “If there is no accommodation to the current culture, Christianity is unintelligible and cannot spread.” What does that mean? It means that we need to stay current in the life of the Lord. Probably an example of this is the Amish or the Mennonites. They started out as a very living testimony to the Lord, and there was great power and works done through them, but they stayed where they were. When I speak of groups like Mennonites or Amish or Baptist, or any other group, I am not speaking of the individual believers within them because within any of these organizations, groups, or whatever is out there, there can be precious believers who love the Lord. I am talking about the overall organization or the system itself. It is not directed at any believer because I am sure that within the Amish and Mennonite communities that even today there are dear believers who love the Lord. But when we think about it in a broad sense, they become irrelevant as one said. There is not that testimony coming out.

On the other hand, if there is too much accommodation to the current culture, it will spread, but it will no longer be Christianity. There are some who focus so much on a social gospel that

they take the cross and Christ out, then you do not have Christianity. So there are always these two extremes pulling us. That is why we want to stay balanced and have a right perspective to stay. Proverbs 22:28 says, "Do not move the ancient boundary." We do not want to move the ancient boundary, but we do want to be living in life and the testimony in the times that we are living in in a very relevant way. We would be the bright light that would be needed so greatly to draw ones to the Lord Himself in these days.

This has just been an introduction to church history. The next time we are going to consider the testimony of Jesus in the first few centuries. There is a very special call that the Lord has upon us, and as we reflect back on our great heritage and see the great faithfulness of the Lord that we would be those He could use in this day in this time. Through time we will see where things have been lost and the testimony has been weakened, but He has always found individuals whom He could use to strengthen the testimony and to reveal more of Himself to them. We want to be vessels who are available for Him to reveal more of Himself to us and to continue to recover and reveal more of what He is desiring for us to do and to be in these last days. I believe we all sense His soon return, so we hear often about being prepared. How are we to be prepared? It is having a greater knowledge and a greater revelation of Jesus Christ in our lives of Him being the reality of our lives far beyond just the teaching. We are thankful for the teaching, but it is really allowing Him to be expressed and live out His life through us for His glory and His honor. This wraps up the introduction, and we will be looking at the first few centuries next time.

Let's pray:

Lord, we do come and thank You. We are thankful how, as we look back, we see You as *the* faithful One, faithful and true. Praise God for that! And Lord, as we have said, we just do not want to be learning the facts, the acts, but we want to be learning Your ways, we want to be learning the lessons. Lord, we want to have a teachable heart that You could really speak to us in this day and time so that we could be the testimony that You are calling us to be for this specific time and specific place that we are living in. Lord, throughout history You have specific ones in specific times, and Lord, we are here for such a time as this. So we want to live for Your glory and Your honor, and that You would continue revealing more and more of Your Son to us individually and together. In Thy name we pray. Amen.