

Onward Towards Jerusalem (3)

Living in Jerusalem

Psalm 26:8 is a Psalm of David's: "Jehovah, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thy glory dwelleth."

Psalm 107:1-8, 26: "Give thanks unto Jehovah; for he is good; for his loving-kindness endureth for ever. Let the redeemed of Jehovah say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the oppressor. And gathered out of the countries, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the sea. They wandered in the wilderness in a desert way, they found no city of habitation; Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them: Then they cried unto Jehovah in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses, And he led them forth by a right way, that they might go to a city of habitation. Let them give thanks unto Jehovah for his loving-kindness, and for his wondrous works to the children of men."

Psalm 107: 26-37: "They mount up to the heavens, they go down to the depths; their soul is melted because of trouble; (that has do with these ones He is speaking of, these children of Israel) They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and they are at their wits' end: Then they cry unto Jehovah in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses; He maketh the storm a calm, and the waves thereof are still: and they rejoice because they are quiet; and he bringeth them unto their desired haven. Let them give thanks unto Jehovah for his loving-kindness, and for his wondrous works to the children of mem; Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the session of the elders. He maketh rivers into a wilderness, and water-springs into dry ground; A fruitful land into a plain of salt, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein. He maketh the wilderness into a pool of water, and the dry land into water-springs; and there he maketh the hungry to dwell, and they establish a city of habitation."

Psalm 107:43: "Whoso is wise, let him observe these things, and let them understand the loving-kindnesses of Jehovah."

Nehemiah 11:1-2: "And the princes of the people dwelt in Jerusalem; and the rest of the people cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem, the holy city, and nine parts in the cities. And the people blessed all the men that willingly offered themselves to dwell in Jerusalem."

Let's pray:

Lord, we come to You once again expressing our utter dependence on You and Your Holy Spirit to communicate divine things that are impossible for us to make clear. But we are so grateful that You are able to do the impossible, and You choose flawed vessels and the weakness of preaching to make known the great mysteries of God. And now we ask You, Lord, in Your mercy would You speak to us? And while we are gathered in Your presence give us a word for the hour that would make a deep impression upon us and cause us to be the kind of people You are looking for. This we ask in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.

We have been sharing in this short series on this thought of “Onward Towards Jerusalem.” When I look at the Bible, there seems to me to be a clear progression of this matter onward towards Jerusalem. When God found His man, Abraham, the father of faith, He apprehended him to be one that would lead His people into the Promised Land. He did something wonderful; He revealed something that was deep in His heart, and it captured the man. It changed this man, and he was never the same again. When you read Hebrews 11:10, you discover what that is. It speaks of Abraham, and it is a spiritual summary of his life, and it says, “And he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” Another version says, “Whose builder and architect is God.”

Now brothers and sisters, that defined this man’s life. From that day on, he was on a progressive journey onward towards Jerusalem. Not only Abraham, or Abram when he was called out, but David was possessed with this view of Jerusalem. Even with all of his flaws and foibles his heart was dedicated to that city. He captured it, and there he was anointed king, where he ruled for some thirty years. That city meant everything to him. David longed for and loved the city of Jerusalem. I think that is very clear.

Not only that, the people were taken into captivity to Babylon because they despised the inheritance of God. Out of every place on the earth, God chose that city in which to dwell and be his habitation. He sent into destruction and ruin at the hand of Gentiles. Can you imagine such discipline! But God did not give up; He called out from those people a remnant who responded, and we read that wonderful psalm of how they were provoked to sing those songs of Jerusalem. But they said, “How can we sing in a foreign land?” They hung up their harps, but they never lost that longing for Jerusalem. And in the end God did a great recovery work through using Gentiles (referring to Cyrus King of Persia), which in itself is amazing that He would sovereignly use these people to do His work.

In the New Testament I was struck by the number of times the Lord Jesus used that phrase ‘Onward Towards Jerusalem’ or ‘Going to Jerusalem.’ Or when you look at that famous prophecy in Isaiah, “His eyes were set like flint toward Jerusalem,” that is the meaning of that prophecy. And of course, there is that great revelation of Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22. How wonderful it is! It is inescapable glory. How precious it is.

I am not trying to convince you; you may not even agree with me, and that is quite okay. But I believe there is a Biblical emphasis of a progression from the beginning when God found His man to the very end when He reveals the fulness of Jerusalem. If you think I am talking about the earthly city, and I want to turn you all into Hebrew nationalists and get you to sell everything you have and move to Jerusalem and find you a hut in Jerusalem, that is not at all what I am talking about. We are talking about the spiritual Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem, the place of God’s choosing, the eternal dwelling of God, His habitation in the Spirit.

So this is the burden. I shared on “Looking for Jerusalem” with Abraham; that was a key to his life. Do not ever mistake it; it was a key to his life. I shared about “Longing for Jerusalem.” These are essential elements. We need to see something first. If we do not see something, which cannot come with human eyes but by divine revelation, we will never understand. However, when we see it, like Abraham, like David, like that remnant that could not stand it any longer in

their place of captivity, we will be forever changed and captured. And it will put in our heart a longing for Jerusalem.

I shared last time about Psalm 132 in which it says, “For Jehovah hath desired, has chosen Zion for his dwelling.” The King James Version says, “His habitation.” And then he repeats it, “This is my rest forever. Here will I dwell for I have desired it.” And more than half of the first part of that Psalm is about David. I believe it is essential that we understand this. God is looking for a people to share His heart with, and in this case in Psalm 132, a man. He is captured by it in the same way Abraham was. And when you have God and that great thing in His heart, and people who have seen it and long for it, then God has what He is looking for.

Now we will conclude with “Living in Jerusalem.” It is important to see, but if that is all we have, we will become visionaries. It is important to have passion and longing, but you can become a mystic. What God is after in the end is not just people who see, not just people who have some affection for the things of God, but He is looking for a people who, in the end, will live in the reality of it, and that is why this third burden is, “Living in Jerusalem.” I hope to make it clear, but I realize only the Holy Spirit can do that. But this has become a deep burden within me, a deep, deep burden. It has pressed me into considering things, meditating on things, concentrating on things, having focus on things in a way maybe I had not been before. I believe, in the end, God is after that city manifest in a people.

There are three things that are important as we start with this. First of all, there is the call, and that is always important. God always begins with calling, and that is The Call to the City. That is what He is doing throughout the ages. There are those who are called out of this world and they are to be called into that city. And in that city they are to discover all of what God is, all of His fulness. There He shares all of Himself, and there we get the experience, the blessing of living in that city. So we will deal with that first, The Call to the City.

We will also look at The Cost of the City. Now there are people that do not like to talk about the cost. I am glad our brother talked about cost last week. But all of a sudden we get sweaty palms; we get nervous and start to think: “Oh my, I thought it was all free. Isn’t it all free?” Salvation is free; it can never be taken away; we never waver from that. But if you are going to follow the Lord, there is a cost, and God is looking for those who are willing to pay that cost.

Then ultimately, what we see in those two verses in Nehemiah is that there is a choice to be made—The Choice of the City. What will be your choice in life? You have many opportunities but there is one choice that rises above every other choice, and God is looking for you to make that choice.

That is an outline. I do that for my benefit and for yours. So hopefully, you do not get confused in knowing where I am going, and hopefully, I do not get confused and forget where I am going.

The Call to the City

Psalm 107 that we read large portions of is the beginning of the fifth book of Psalms. I hear people say, “let’s turn to the book of Psalms, but if you do not know it, the book of Psalms is

divided into five books, and you really ought to say, "Let's turn to Psalms, Book 5. That would be proper.

So in the very beginning of Psalms, Book 5, there is this terrific psalm and this terrific psalm is sort of a historic perspective of the children of Israel and all of their failings, all of their wanderings, and all of the problems they experienced. It also tells us of the mercy of God when they would turn back to Him, and He would turn back to them. And when He turned back to them, He would reveal to them His loving kindness.

But brothers and sisters, I want to say something, and I may offend some of you. But I do not think this psalm is strictly speaking about the loving kindness of Jehovah, even though that verse is repeated four times. It is about something that is in His heart that He was leading them to, and He wanted them to experience it in their lives, and that was the city of habitation. You clearly see it when you read this psalm.

I Corinthians 10:11 is one of my favorite verses in the New Testament because when I discovered this verse in the Bible, I understood for the first time what the whole Old Testament was about. And this verse says,

"Now all these things happened to them as types, and have been written for our admonition, upon whom the end of the ages are come."

So this is not about historic Jerusalem only; it is about that greater Jerusalem. But this is about what is in God's heart, what He is calling His people to, and what He is delivering His people from to bring them into. That is an overall view, as they said in the Netherlands when I speak, "That is a helicopter view." I turned to my translator and said, "What do you mean, a helicopter view?" He said, "You are looking from above." This is a helicopter view of Psalm 107. All the dealings, all the wanderings, and all of the turmoil was to show them that city of habitation. That is the most important thing. I can prove it to you, for it does not take much.

Psalm 107:4: "They wandered in the wilderness in a desert way, they found no city of habitation." That was the point. It was not their wanderings; it was that they had not found what was in His heart—no city of habitation.

Verse 7: "And he led them forth (now what was He leaving them to? Where was He taking them?) by a right way, that they might go to a city of habitation." That was what was in His heart.

Verse 30: "And they rejoice because they are quiet; and he bringeth them unto their desired haven." Jerusalem was to be their haven of rest, just as it was His place of rest.

Verse 36: "And there (speaking of Jerusalem) he maketh the hungry to dwell, and they establish a city of habitation." Now, that in the end is what God is after, the city of habitation to be established. That is what He wants. Then if that is not enough look at verse 43. This is the end of the Psalmist's instruction, and He makes a point, and if you do not understand this point, you will miss the meaning of the Psalm.

Verse 43: "Whoso is wise, let him observe these things, and let them understand the loving kindnesses of Jehovah."

Now for those of you who say, "There it is, brother, it is living proof; it is all about the lovingkindness of Jehovah." His saying, "Let them understand the lovingkindness of Jehovah." It is all for a reason; it is all with purpose in view. It is all to bring them into something; it is all to establish them, it is that city of habitation, the city of the living God. This is what I believe this psalm is about.

As a matter of fact, some of you may have "The Treasury of David," written by Charles Haddon Spurgeon. I love "The Treasury of David;" it is a very beautiful book. I used it to decorate one of Linda's rooms, by the way; it looked so nice with the leather binding. Once in a while I would pull it out and read it. It is a powerful book. Charles Haddon Spurgeon knew what this was about. This is not just about believers with troubles, but he said in his introduction: "The psalmist commences by dedicating this poem to the redeemed who had been gathered from the captivity." In other words, it was that remnant He intended to bring out of their troubles, out of their bondage, those ones who were in captivity and into His inheritance. That was the focus of the redeemed in verse 2. It was not just in general; it was a specific calling to bring ones back to His original purpose.

Our focus can never be upon our failings. It often is; it trips us up. Our focus can not just be upon God's dealings and deliverances. Our focus has to be on the city of habitation or we will never understand our calling. His loving kindness is related to the city of habitation, and that is what this psalm tells us.

William Jay was an inspired writer. Now I love the way people write bio's of these people after they are long gone. Sometimes I wonder about all the truth in them. But they say of William Jay, who was a very inspired Christian, that he was an English nonconformist divine who preached sixty years at Argyle Chapel in Bath, England. He was an imminent English Congregationalist Minister of Regency, England. I do not even know what that means. I simply would say, "I think he was a dear brother. That is the most important thing." That dear man saw something, and when I read it, it captivated me. He said, speaking of this city, "It is a city of habitation first of all." That is God's focus. In other words, we are not just to think about it. We are not just to study about it, we are not just to talk about it; it is a place of habitation. What a difference that makes! We need to see that.

He said something that I thought was so profound: "It is not a city of inspection." I think many of us will sit and go in and noodle into all the words and understand all the phrases and become great in our understanding, but there is little in our experience, and God never intended that; He does not want that.

He said, "It is not a city of visitation." I love that line. If you get introduced as a visitor all the time, you ought to take notice. Maybe you are not in the city of habitation which is a real experience. Often people come and go. I will never forget, I once went to Brother Kaung so distressed about people who would come and go. It used to bother me to no end, and I will never forget our dear Brother Kaung in many of his words of help and council have stuck with me. He said, "Do not ever be surprised." And I said, "What? I want them all to stay." He said, "Do not ever be surprised at who comes and who goes." And I have never forgotten it.

But this brother, William Jay had inspirational light. He saw that it was not a city of visitation. He made it clear that it is a city of habitation. It is a place where people live, do business, they have their lives, their livelihood, and raise their families. They are together in fellowship with the living God and with one another, and in that, God's purpose is expressed. We are not to be inspectors to look and just understand. I want to say it again, we are not to be visitors; we are to be ones who live there. That is what Psalm 107 is about. Do not ever forget it.

The word "habitation" is divinely connected to Jerusalem throughout the Scripture, and it reveals the great thing that is in the heart of God. When I looked at Ephesians 2:22, I thought of old J. Vernon McGee. Some of you who are old like me may remember J. Vernon McGee. I can still remember his voice and inflections, and he was very peculiar. When he described Ephesians as, "the high-water mark of Paul's missionary revelation," you may have wondered where it came from. This was from that dear old country-spoken J. Vernon McGee, and I used to listen to him on the radio when I was newly saved.

In Ephesians 2:22, that high-water mark of revelation, is revealed as the mystery of God. Now if I asked you, "What is the mystery of God?" What would you tell me? It is Christ. What is the mystery of Christ, which is also revealed in Ephesians? It is the church. And so you begin to understand the formation of Jerusalem. It is together the mystery of God and the mystery of Christ combined in one, and God and His people become an expression of His fulness.

Ephesians 2:22: "In whom you also are built together (this is a description of the church) a habitation for God in the Spirit." That is what the church is. So if you understand that the revelation of this mystery is the church, is Jerusalem. If you do not believe that, turn to the end of the Bible. In Revelation 21-22 when we see the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven as a bride prepared for her husband, and we discover that it is the place where God tabernacles with man and where man tabernacles with God. That is Jerusalem. That is the city of habitation.

Remember Solomon said when he dedicated the temple in II Chronicles 6:1-2: "Jehovah said He would dwell in thick darkness. But I have built a habitation, a house of habitation for Thee."

That is what he saw. That was the secret that was shared with David who prepared all of his life for it. He was forbidden to build it, and his son built it. And it says, "Even a settled place for thee to abide in forever." That is what Jerusalem is. That is the city of habitation.

You remember when the queen of Sheba visited Solomon and saw the glory of his house and all of his things. And the last thing it says in I Kings 10:1-10: "And when she saw Solomon ascending the house of the Lord, her breath was taken away." It was so glorious. Even to see the glory of that habitation for God in the Spirit, her breath was gone. Then she said that famous phrase, "the half has not been told." That is how wonderful God's habitation is! I hope you understand it, for I think it is of great importance.

Another word that describes the habitation of God that occurs again and again in the Word is this word "dwell." It is a simple word. If you look at that word, it is connected again and again to Jerusalem because Jerusalem is not supposed to be an unoccupied house. It is to be a place where we dwell, where we live, where we are with one another and where we are with God

which is even more precious. That is the thought. God said, “I have desired it for My dwelling place.” And He said, “It should be your dwelling place.”

I read a story once that I could not believe, and I do not know if it is true. They talked about the ultra-rich in America, and I do not know who those people are. I read about them in the news, but I do not understand their life. They said, “Many of them have nine homes, very expensive homes, very nice homes. And very often, they do not ever go to those homes or they might spend maybe a night in that home.” Why would you have a home and not live in it? However, I believe that is precisely the problem of many of us who are believers. We do not live in the home. We are not living in Jerusalem. We call it our habitation; we call it our dwelling place, but are we daily living with the saints? I think this is a question we need to seriously ask before the Lord. You begin to understand His dwelling place in the context of Jerusalem.

Psalm 135:21 says, “Blessed be Jehovah out of Zion, who dwelleth in Jerusalem! Hallelujah!” Do you understand that is a thing of praise? How wonderful it is! How wonderful it is!

Zechariah 8:1-2: “And the word of Jehovah of hosts came unto me, saying, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with a great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great fury. Thus saith Jehovah: I am returned unto Zion, and I will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and Jerusalem shall be called, The city of truth; and the mountain of Jehovah of hosts, The holy mountain. Thus saith Jehovah of hosts.”

In verse 1 He said, “I will dwell in Jerusalem.” But in verse 8 He tells us something that is even to me more precious and that is how we have been included.

Verse 8 God speaking, “I will bring them, (meaning the people of God) and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness.”

Do you understand that? These are the two things that God is after—Him dwelling in Jerusalem, and us dwelling here, which means living in Jerusalem or staying in Jerusalem. The Hebrew word means ‘married.’ You know, I am married to Linda, and I stay with her pretty often. Are you married to Jerusalem? That is what the Hebrew word means. Are you dwelling in Jerusalem? Are you abiding? That is what the Hebrew word means. Many saints have no idea what I am talking about. They would think this gray-haired old man is somehow talking about Jerusalem, Israel, and that is the farthest thing from my mind. This is God’s ultimate end and purpose.

Isaiah 4:3: This is the question: “And it shall come to pass that he who remaineth in Zion, and he that is left in Jerusalem, shall be called holy,— every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem.” This is a most important verse.

The question is simple for those who will be called holy or those who are written among the living in Jerusalem, but it is the most important question that I can ask you today. Are you living in Jerusalem? I believe that is what God is asking. “Yes, I am willing to deliver you again and again when you wander away and you turn back to my lovingkindness. I will deliver you again and again because I am faithful. But this is the question I have for you: Are you dwelling in that city of

habitation? Is it your home? Is it your dwelling place? Is it your life?" These are very important questions.

The Cost of this City

I appreciate Jerry telling us that in the nine years they lived outside of Atlanta, GA, they had never heard in the churches that they had attended speaking of the cross but maybe twice. I think that is unmistakably the way Christianity has gone. I think he used the words, "They preach a crossless Christianity, and they speak of a Christless Gospel." In the attempt to woo people and win people, we have said there is no cost; it is all free. Salvation is free; eternal life is free; it can never be taken away, but the Lord always spoke about the cost, and that is the cross. Unless we are willing to be a people who pay the cost for the city, we will never experience the wonder and the glory and the joy of what it means to live in that city. There is a cost to be paid.

The remnant that returned from Babylon paid a great cost to go back to Jerusalem. It was devastated. Why would you want to go back? If I had my stagecoach or whatever they traveled in, and I rolled up in Jerusalem and saw the scene that Nehemiah saw of the gates burned with fire and the rubble of stones and the misery that was in Jerusalem, I would think, "What is the fastest highway back to Babylon?" But they paid the cost because when they were languishing in Babylon with a purposeless life, they saw something, and they could never unsee it. And that 60,000 gave themselves to go back into that place of ruin, into that place of continuous conflict, into that place of trouble, and rebuilt Jerusalem to the glory of God. I think they paid the great cost. Everything of value in life costs.

I want to speak about two groups of people I know nothing of because I was neither one. First of all, look at athletes. Now I happen to like sports, but athletes pay a tremendous cost for that little wreath Paul spoke about, which will fade in no time. Think about the discipline, the work, the training. Think about what they have to give up and sacrifice. Nevertheless, they are willing to pay the cost for that moment of lime-light. I was never that gifted to have to worry about that.

For those who may not know what the lime-light means, it is a theatrical term. It is a way they used to light the stage; they would pump gas into a cannister of quick lime, and the result was a flash of light, and then it was gone. It is momentary limelight. Is that what you are chasing? I believe even those people understood cost and were willing to pay it for that short reward.

Then there are the musicians. I never understood people who would pick away at a piano for hours upon hours. I am glad there are some that do, but you would not want to hear me picking away at a piano. But they know that there are endless hours of paying a cost to be prepared to be a great musician. Now how is it that we believers think there is no cost. We preach a grace so anemic in the interest of trying to capture ones that we capture no one.

Think about business men, and this I know about. There is a cost to being a successful business man. There are hours involved; there are headaches involved. There are times when you wonder if will you have enough money to pay your employees, and you have the sense of all those families who are depending upon you; there is a real cost. But brothers and sisters, when it comes to eternal things, do we understand that there is a cost?

And the second question: are we willing to pay that cost? I think this is very important, and I will read verses you know so well. The Lord did not shy away from this. You might think that He should have; if He were a good evangelical He would have.

Matthew 16:24-26: "Then Jesus said to His disciples, if anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever shall desire to save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what does a man profit, if he should gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul?"

That is the cost of discipleship. Did you notice it said, "What does a man profit if he gains the whole world and he suffers the loss of his soul?" Did you notice that it did not say, "loss of his spirit"? Once you are saved, your spirit is saved. Once you are born again, once you are born anew by the Spirit, you can never be lost, but you can lose your soul. You can lose your soul to this world. You can lose your soul to fame. You can lose your soul to money. You can lose your soul to love. You can lose your soul for so many things. Is it worth gaining those things that will not abide for eternity? I think it is clear that when we speak of Jerusalem, we have to talk about cost.

Let me put it another way because I want to drive this home. If you are already mad at me, you will just have to forgive me; the Word says that. If you are already mad at me, the cross is not optional; the cross is necessary. When I hear people speak of the cross, I wonder if they are just talking about the Lord's death or if they really know something of "not I but Christ." If they really know something of "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless, I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in me; and the life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (see Galatians 2:20). Do we know what it means to bear our cross? Do we know what it means to pay a cost? Now at this point you all may be very mad at me, but I do believe this is a very important thing.

I will never forget something Brother Sparks said in a little book of Nehemiah, "The Recovering of the Lord's Testimony in Fullness." And I have told you before that it changed my life. He summarized his whole understanding of that book with just three points. I have never forgotten them; they still speak to my spirit. He said. "What we need to do first of all is have a realization that God is concerned with the accomplishment of something worthy of Himself." It is not for us, but it includes us. How marvelous!"

The second thing he said: "People should become aware of what that great something is in the heart of God, what it is that God is concerned with, and then they shall be moved to cooperate with Him in it." I will never forget when I read that. I knew that was the call that the Lord was calling me to.

The third thing he said: "And then in the third place that we recognize that the object in the heart of God and this cooperation with Him by His people involves a very real conflict and cost." Amazing! "And that His people must face and be ready to accept this." This to me is so very important. May we see what the Lord is after so much that we are willing to pay the cost.

Now that I have depressed you, and some of you are laying in the floor, let me encourage you. Whatever cost you pay will pale in comparison to the blessings you receive now and in the

future. You remember the story of the rich young ruler in the Gospel of Luke (see Luke 18:18-30). He had endless funds; he must have been a Jeff Bezos of the period in early Jerusalem. He comes to the Lord and says, "What can I do that I can follow You?" And the Lord quoted the Commandments to the rich young ruler, and he was so self-secure that he said, "Well, I have done all of them." I cannot imagine being so self-deceived that you would say to the Lord, "Well, I have done all of those." Nevertheless, he did. But the Lord knew something because this story of the rich young ruler is about cost and reward. It is not about taking away his money. You know some people would say, "Give all your money; give up everything you have and follow the Lord." That is the message we hear. It is not the message. The message is precisely that you cannot do it. The message is precisely that He said, "One thing is lacking" I know that rich young ruler wished the Lord had not said that, "It is one thing you lack." "What is it?" he said. "Go and sell all you have and follow Me." And it says, "He went away sad for he had much money."

Now here is the glory of this story. It tore the disciples up. They did not know what to do with it. You remember Peter said, "Who then can be saved?" That would have been my reaction. "Who then can be saved?" Who can pay this cost? And the Lord in His mercy said, "What is impossible with men is possible with God." That was the message. You cannot pay the cost. As a matter of fact, you probably do not want to pay the cost. But what is impossible for you is possible for God.

One time I went to Brother Kaung about a matter that I could not break through on. I could not! The cost seemed unbearable, and I went to Brother Kaung and said, "Brother Kaung, what do I do?" I was prepared for anything, but I did not know what to expect. And he said, "Just tell the Lord, you are willing to be willing." I am telling you that grace came out of that man's mouth, and my whole perspective changed. I realized that I could not do it. I realized that it was impossible for me, but it was not impossible for God. So I went back and took that short word of encouragement and said to the Lord, "I cannot do it; it is impossible. You are asking too much. It is impossible." And soon I discovered a growing willingness, and it was a spiritual breakthrough. I do not know if you have had those things; I am sure you have.

Then the Lord said something even more precious. Peter said, "We left homes; we have left everything." And the Lord said in His mercy in Luke 18:29-30: "And He said to them, Verily I say to you, There is no one who has left home, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more at this time, and in the coming age life eternal."

Now everybody in this room who is afraid of cost and thinking: "Oh, He is going to ask me to leave my wife, He is going to ask me to leave my children, He is going to ask me to leave my home." That is not what He is saying. He is taking the most extreme case to make a point that if you gave up the most precious things, things that were the best, things that were incalculable to your heart, even if you give up everything, which is what Peter said, "We have given up everything." Didn't he say that? He said, "You will receive multiple times more in this life and that to come." I think this is the cost, and I believe this is something we are called to.

The Choice of the City

I will finish with this last point, and this is a very important point: the choice of the city; you have a choice before you. God always puts choices before us. I think it is very clear. Let me read that verse again in Nehemiah 11:1-2: "And the princes of the people dwelt in Jerusalem; and the rest of the people cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem, the holy city, and nine parts in the cities (the other cities). And the people blessed all the men that willingly offered themselves to dwell in Jerusalem."

This is the most important lesson I can share with you about living in Jerusalem. There are three groups of people mentioned here. First of all, there are the rulers; they did not have a choice. This was the city of the civil government of Israel; they had to live there. They could not get into their SUV and commute to Jerusalem to make a vote. They lived there; no choice, absolutely no choice. But there was another group, and they drew lots. They always drew lots in Israel; you even see it in the book of Acts when they drew lots to replace the fallen one. But in these lots one in ten, whoever got their lot in life would have to live in Jerusalem. Now they may not have wanted to live in Jerusalem, but they had to live in Jerusalem because the lot fell on them. It was not their choice. But there was a third group of people, most special. "And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell in Jerusalem." The first two had no choice; the third group had a choice. I never quite saw that as clearly until recently, and I thought, "Lord, how loving You are. How special You are. You give me a choice." He created man and woman in His wisdom with a free will for only one reason, and that was to make a choice. And here they made the choice to willingly live in Jerusalem, and it says, "And the people blessed them." I think that is amazing.

I was reading the old Brethren writer, Edward Dennett, who said something about this, and it really hit me. He said, "Those of whom the lot fell went of necessity, (How many of us serve the Lord out of necessity?) but those who willingly offered themselves were moved by their own choice and affection. The spontaneous offering of themselves could only spring from love for that place which God had designed and chose for His habitation, and therefore evidence that they in some measure entered into the mind and heart of God." I think that is powerful insight. The Brethren had powerful insight. They were men deeply studied in the Word, and they saw this last portion of the verse was the importance of it.

Are we willing? Are we among the willing? I think this is the message in the end. If we are among the willing, then we will be among the blessed. The people will bless them. Do you see it? Brothers and sisters, in the end when it comes into Jerusalem, this boils down to the finite thing that is most important. What will you do with your life? You have a choice. Every day you have multiple choices, but when it comes to the Lord, there are only two. I always remember Romans 12:1-2: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present yourself a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. Be not conformed to this world (that is one choice): but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

Romans 8:29 talks about those who are called according to purpose, who are conformed to the image of His Son. That is the only two choices. In the end of your life, you may have made

thousands of choices, but they are somewhat unimportant in the light of eternity. But in the light of eternity, when it comes to living in Jerusalem, you have but two choices. You either stay in Babylon and be conformed to this world, or you can come out and be willing to pay the cost that you cannot pay, which only He can do, and dwell in that city of habitation. This is the Great Work that God is doing. This is the great thing that is in His heart.

As Brother Dennett said, "They saw something of it, and they made the choice." Are you willing to make that choice? How many more years do you have? I just turned seventy-one, and they went quicker than I thought. All of a sudden I was twenty-one just a short while ago and starting with this firm. Now on December 30th I am retiring from this firm. Where did those fifty years go? But I know this, and however many days I have left, my choice is going to be like Joshua's choice. In Joshua 24:15 at the end of this book, he said, "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." This is what living in Jerusalem means.

Lord, we come to You in real dependence asking You to speak to our hearts. With all kinds of fears and trepidations, we wonder with life ahead of us, what is in store? But we tell You, Lord, we want to be among the willing that chose to live in Jerusalem. We do not want to be among those who are compelled. We want to be those who are constrained by the love of God. And Lord, in our weakness and the failings as You know, we look at cost, and we shy away just like the rich young ruler. But if he had only said, "Lord, I cannot do it." Peter said, "We have given all," and You would have given them that great encouragement. Lord, take what is here of Your words, and erase my words. Give us words of life that we understand what it means, living in Jerusalem, and if You do that we will experience a glory, a joy, a fulness that we can hardly imagine because that is Your purpose and Your desire. Amen.