

The Testimony of Jesus (Part 17)

Lord, we are continually thankful for the great privilege we have to gather around Your table, and it does speak of the great testimony of Your very life, Your love, a life laid down. And we are thankful as we remember You at the table that there is a hope set before us of Your soon return. And Lord, as we have been considering this matter of church history, we have seen Your great faithfulness in spite of man, Your great faithfulness throughout the centuries. As we draw near to the end of the age, we want to be those who are continuing to seek You in a fuller and greater way that we could be those prepared for Your return, we could be those who are hastening Your return, and that we would be those who are being the testimony of Jesus in the days that we find ourselves living in. In Your wonderful name. Amen.

We are finally drawing to the conclusion of this matter of church history. For those of you who have a good memory, you will remember that we started in March 2021, almost two years. There will be no test for review, but we are going to do a little bit of review to start the time on why we have been considering this snapshot of church history, and lessons we should be learning in trying to prepare for the days we are living in.

Why Consider the Testimony of Jesus?

Why are we considering this matter of the testimony of Jesus throughout church history? It can really encourage us in our faithfulness seeing how He is ever faithful, and He is continuing to be faithful in all that He has upon His heart in accomplishing His purpose. Everything that our Lord does is related to the testimony of Jesus, His Son having the preeminence in everything, and everything being summed up in Him. That is the goal, that is the end, and that is what He is jealous for, His bride being made ready.

Also, as we look at these things, it gives us a greater perspective of our heritage. So often we live in the present, but we are thankful as we reflect back we can see our great heritage and the ones who have gone before us that enable us to so freely gather today. Even as we consider the matter of the Lord's table, there are ones who died in order to preserve the purity and testimony of this table, and how we are able to so freely take of it today. It also keeps us in a balanced walk which is a very special walk that we have. It keeps us in a perspective and a balance that keeps us from thinking too highly of ourselves, "Oh, we are it. We really have come into something." No, that is the pride of life; that ends up being divisive, thinking we are better than others. It also keeps us from thinking that we are too low: "This is nothing. What have we been brought into? This has just been going on, but it is really nothing." There is a balance about the special walk that He has called us into. And as it has been shared many times throughout the centuries, "It is His story." As we look at history, it is all about His story; it is His testimony of who He is. It is not our testimony; it is not about us; it is about Him.

We also see that there is nothing new under the sun. And what are we talking about "nothing new under the sun?" So often as we look at the days we are living in, we can lose the perspective of everything that has gone before us. In Ecclesiastes Solomon talks about "under heaven and under the sun."

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."

Where is the "all is vanity?" All that is vanity is under the sun. There is a contrast in these verses and our perspective. Are we walking under the sun or are we walking under heaven? John Blanchard shared about our natural eye versus the eye of faith. If we look with the natural eye at the world today, we will be discouraged, disappointed, and in despair; it is hopeless. There is no hope for anything. If we look at the condition of the church, we wonder how God is ever going to accomplish anything. But if we are living under heaven, there is encouragement and strength to press on. It is a matter of which son/sun we are living under. *The Son* is the one we are living under, and it helps us with our perspective.

As we look back through history we see that there is nothing new under the sun upon this earth. Back in the first century even before Christ, there was abortions, homosexuality, LGBT, pandemics, and social injustice. Ever since the fall, there has always been social and racial inequality and justice going on, unjust governments, and we see how Christianity is in a weakened condition today. During various times throughout history it has been in a weakened condition. There is nothing new here. But let's keep it in perspective as we draw near to the end. It does not make what we are going through any less intense or severe, but the intensity is accelerating. There is an accelerating factor in the days we are living in that ones before us have not faced. So we are just thankful that we can keep in a right perspective of what we are going through today and that the Lord will help us.

What is the Testimony of Jesus?

What is the testimony of Jesus? He testifies of Himself in Revelation 1:17-18. He testifies of who He is, His character, His nature, He is the first and last, He is the living One. He was dead, but He is alive forever more. We see His character and nature, what He is doing, and what He has done. It is all in what He has done.

He is desiring for His life to be seen and expressed in His people individually and corporately. That is what He is jealous for. He is jealous that we would not just know about Him, we would not just have His life in us, but He wants that life expressed. In the book of Acts in the city of Antioch is where they were first called Christians. Before those various disciples went to Antioch, all of these people lived together. In our day and time it would be called a small city. Now In small cities or small towns everybody knows everybody else; you know each other's business, their lives, all their ups and downs, and many other things. That pretty much described what you would find in Antioch. Everybody was going about living their own lives, but then these disciples came into town, and they started sharing this strange message. As ones began hearing and then accepting it, it impacted and changed their lives. Instead of going out drinking at night, they would gather together. Instead of gossiping about people, they would care for them. Instead of looking down on people, they would take care of those in need. The other people in Antioch saw a new life expressed in these believers. It was not just because they

gathered for meetings, although meetings are important, but they saw this life of Christ expressed. They were their neighbors, ones they had known before, but as they learned about this One called Jesus their lives were different. Not only did it continue to expand the Gospel, but there was a testimony of His life being expressed through believers. That is what He is jealous for today!

Why is the Testimony of Jesus so Vital?

As we said, it is the key to everything that God is doing. As you look back through both the Old Testament and the New Testament, how does God renew or recover or strengthen His people? It is always by a new, a fresh, a greater revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. We find that to be true in the lives of Abraham, Joshua and Isaiah. Isaiah was really down after Uzziah died. What happened? He then got a greater revelation of Christ. The Lord appeared to Abraham and called him out of Ur of the Chaldees, and throughout his life He continued to reveal more and more of Himself to him.

The letter In Hebrews was written to those who were in a time of great crisis. What do we see as the whole essence of Hebrews? It is bringing them back to our Lord Jesus. "Consider Jesus, the Author and Perfector of your faith. Consider Him as your High Priest. Consider Him as that better sacrifice." Everything was to bring them back to Himself.

And that is what the book of Revelation is about. It is revealing His Son to us because the time is near. And how we need to pray in the days that we are living in that we would get that fuller and greater revelation of our Lord Jesus. It is really vital that we see what we have been called unto in this day and time because without purpose we will go anywhere and do whatever we want to do. But as we see the testimony of Jesus in church history, we begin to see what God wants and what His desire is.

Brother Sparks said, "What God wants to be displayed or seen is not a creed, doctrine or system of teaching, but it His life in His people."

The testimony of Jesus was entrusted to the church. In that lampstand in Revelation 2-3, the focus was not on the lampstand, but there was that bright light shining forth, the light of Life coming forth. And the church is the vessel to keep hold of that Light to display the testimony of Jesus, that light of Life we are to see. We do not have a message of ourselves; the church does not have its own message. We have the message of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we see Christ in all His fulness, we will see His body; we will see the church. We will see all that He is in fulness.

I was reading a little book this week, and I came across this quote, and I think it is relevant as you look at all of the lives in church history. We can learn from the past, but we are to live in the present. We can learn from all the past, but we are called to live in the present. And that has been one of the challenges throughout church history or really history in general. Things are going a certain way, and then God changes it in order to reveal something else. Many people like to live in the past but not the present. We can learn from the past, but we are not to live back there. We can look back and see all that our Lord has been doing throughout history.

When we think of the Mennonites and the Amish, we make fun of the way they dress today. But when they began to meet together and the Lord really touched their hearts, they did not say, "Okay, how can we dress to have a uniform so that we can send a message?" All they did back then was to dress in a simple way which was contemporary for that day and time. They did not stand out at all, they were very simple. But then they held on to the past and said, "We have to keep dressing like this." They did not progress into living in a contemporary way for the days they are now living in.

It was the same way with the Quakers. They had a unique way of dressing with big belt buckles, funny looking hats, and things like that. They continued to maintain that, but it was just the way they dressed back then. There is always this resistance to change. One of the things we will notice throughout church history is that after the first part of the history, it is usually the religious organizations or Christendom in general who provide that resistance to what God is doing through His people and His Son.

The Early Church

In a kind of brief overview now; we know the church was predestined before the foundation of the world. We see how Adam and Eve were the first picture of Christ and the church, that corporate expression of the Head and the body. It was really through the fruit of Christ's travail at Calvary that the church was born, and it began in the book of Acts with those 120 who were baptized into one body. And we are thankful how as many have said, "Today the book of Acts is still being written." In Acts 1:1 it says, "The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach."

Acts was the beginning, and that book is still being written today. We are thankful that in the early church it had a good healthy birth. It was a perfect birth, and it grew despite the problems, but it was never sinless perfect. There was an Ananias and Sapphira, there were widows who were being neglected; nevertheless, the church continued to grow. Sometimes we can have the impression that problems can hinder, but actually problems reveal more of Christ to us.

If there were never any problems in any of the churches, we would not have many of the epistles because there were issues within them, and through the epistles came a greater revelation of Christ and His heart. God did not come into an assembly and say, "Okay, you folks in Colosse, since you are practicing Gnosticism, I am through with you." He humbled Himself and revealed more of Christ, and he brought them back. We can be encouraged and helped by that because it is God's heart. He is always for the recovering of His people and strengthening us. He never throws us out; He has paid too great of a price for us. We saw that at the table this morning.

Christians were first considered a sect of Judaism, but because of various ones who were beginning to undergo some persecution under Nero, and the temple being destroyed in AD 70, it really brought about for the first time a distinction between Judaism and Christianity. At first they thought Christianity was just a subset of Judaism, but there became a clear testimony between these two groups, and from that they preceded on.

Church History Timeline

When the persecution started, there were always the faithful ones through the Montanists, Novatians, and Priscillians which we have talked about before. But one of the things that we notice in this first 500 years, 300 AD, was when Constantine came into power. He made Christianity the state religion, and once it became the state religion there was a great distinction then between the testimony of Jesus and Christendom. When it became a state religion, if ones were members of that state and they did certain things, they were automatically members of the church according to Constantine. It did not matter whether you were a believer or an unbeliever, it brought in a great mixture. That is when the big mixture came in, and it is a significant point in history because there was a great divide. They started using the words, “Christendom” and “the testimony of Jesus.” That is when the Roman Church first began to gain its world power, and it continued to gain more and more power.

This next timeline is from 600-1300. All of these dates are approximate; I just tried to give some rough dates here. As the Roman Church continued to gain more and more power, we are thankful that there were faithful ones scattered throughout Europe and Asia. This is really what is referred to as the period of the dark ages, and technically the dark ages went on for a couple more centuries. In the midst of the great persecution there was the inquisition, and believers were being killed for their beliefs; and this is the time Islam was born. We can see two great powers coming against the testimony of Jesus—Islam and the Holy Roman Empire. One of the great divides within the Roman Catholic Church was when the East and West divided; the East went into Russia and Greece, and Rome stayed throughout Europe.

Also, the crusades were done by the Roman Catholic Church. Even today we are still suffering from the consequences of the Crusades. People are still remembering the way that was done, and it is associated with all believers. When the world looks upon us, they see all of Christianity; they see Christendom; they do not make a distinction of those who stand for the testimony of the Lord wholly. And it is sad how much various ones have done to damage the name of our Lord Jesus.

Then we come up to 1300-1500, and this is really prereformation. These were ones that the Lord used in a great way to bring about a reformation because in general there was death everywhere. There was not much of a testimony, but we see through these various ones, the Waldenses, Friends of God, and then there are names that we are familiar with, Wycliffe, Hus, Tyndale, Savonarola. They were really preparing the way for Luther, Zwingli and others to come in. It is precious how in II Chronicles it speaks about how God’s eye goes to and fro looking toward anyone whose heart is wholly His that He can strongly support, and He found various ones. We have mentioned a number of these names and how God used them, but before they became well known, they were nobodies. They were simply faithful, loving not their lives unto death.

During this time there continued to be chaos in the world. There was a hundred-year war going on throughout Europe, there was the black death, and Islam’s great power through Constantinople. One of the greatest things that was used to impact Christianity in general, both

good and bad, within all sectors was the invention of the printing press. This was used to print tracts and Bibles, but also, on the other side they could print things against the testimony of Jesus. So it was used for good and bad.

Then we come up to the reformation time, and they recovered the justification by faith. Before that truth was revealed, everybody thought they had to work their way into heaven; it was justification by works. Then the truth of faith was recovered. Also the authority of the Word of God came about. The Word of God had been greatly neglected, and the authority of it was recovered. Also recovered was that all believers have direct access to God. It was thought that everybody had to go through a religious person such as a priest or somebody like that. But it was recovered that all can come directly with access to God. That is what is so precious as we gather around the table. Everyone can open up their mouth and worship the Lord. We do not have to wait for somebody to lead us or direct us or any of those things.

It continued on with the reformers, but we find that they went just so far, and then the radical reformation continued on for a time. Then there was a great move of the United Brethren. But also out of this came many denominations that were formed during this time that we know— Baptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and various others who came in.

After this we come up to the time of the Great Awakenings with Wesley and Whitfield, Zinzendorf, the Moravians, and these were great moves. This was also the golden age of hymns. Actually, the hymn that we sang this morning was from this era by John Newton. We are thankful that we have such a great treasure of hymns which is a part of our great heritage.

As we come up to today, we find ones whom we are a little more familiar with—Spurgeon, Moody, the Brethren. And coming into the days that we are living in are the Jesus Movement, Charismatics, Fellowships. Throughout this period, particularly in 1900 and 2000, all through Europe, China, U. S. and India, world-wide, there were independent assemblies which were just meeting under the Headship of Christ. We are thankful for what the Brethren had recovered and what others had recovered to be able to just freely gather. It is a tremendous work that God has done!

Also during this time, we see that when God moves, the enemy will bring in a counterfeit—Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Marxism, Darwinism and Freud. Even when we talk about unity of the Brethren, there was an ecumenical movement that came in. The big difference between what the Lord is doing as far as establishing the oneness that we have is that He begins from within. When we are born again, we are born into the body of Christ; we are one, and He calls us to maintain that unity. The ecumenical movement begins from the outside; it tries to bring us together outwardly, but our inward hearts in reality are not there.

Fruit of the Testimony of Jesus in His People

We are thankful for these 2,000 years. Some of the characteristics we see within each movement as far as the fruit of the testimony of Jesus and His people throughout the centuries are concerned is that the Lord Jesus is the living Head as seen in believers' lives. He is not just

declared to be Head with their tongues, but in the lives of ones who are really seeking Him they are finding Him for direction and for His will to be done.

These are not in any particular order. I am not saying that one is more important than the other, but these are just some of the fruit that we find. The Holy Spirit is given His rightful place. He is to work, to lead, to guide, to reveal more of Jesus, to show us God's will, to reveal the fulness of what He is wanting for us. This comes in.

The Word of God is the sole authority; that is one of the precious things we see in each of these movements that the Word of God is the very foundation. That is the basis. It is not as if they had to find something new: "What is a new truth? What is a contemporary truth? What is the truth for today?" The Word of God was there, and it is relevant today.

Also, we have the functioning of the priesthood of all believers. When we are born again, we are made living stones, and we are also made priests unto Him. However, we can be living stones and not be functioning living stones. We can also be priests without functioning. But He is calling us to be functioning priests unto Him so that each one has that particular way of expressing Christ in their life.

Also, another thing that is seen is the love of the brethren as it is manifested in word and deed, which is a great testimony to the world. One of the greatest Gospel messages that the world has seen throughout the centuries is the love of the brethren. As one sees the love and care expressed to one another or as they receive that loving care and are touched by it, it is probably the greatest Gospel message that the church has. They see that it is not these people who are doing it; it is Christ who has done it.

Also, this is one of the most popular things in everybody's life, and that is the cross working daily in believers' lives. It is interesting that when we mention the cross, so often we think of it as negative. We say, "Oh, there is the cross again; it is heavy." And all it shows is that we do not have a full understanding of the cross. If we really see what Christ did at the cross, it would liberate us from this world. It would liberate us from ourself. It would liberate us from sin and from the flesh. He has brought us into the fulness of His life. The cross is the greatest blessing of life that we have ever experienced. It is the way that we can come to the place of enjoying the fulness of what He has for us. We talk about the cross as our friend because it does so much, but the enemy loves to distort it and say, "It is just about dying." But that which is dying is worthless. As the work of the cross works within us, what needs to die is utterly worthless in eternity. We think that these things are so valuable. We have things that we just cannot let go, but it is utterly valueless. It becomes valueless when we see Him. When we look at it, it can look to be of great value, but once we see Him, we will see the vanity of the things that we hold onto, and we will let them go. That is where we see the testimony throughout the centuries.

Also, there is the wonderful testimony of separation from the world and unto Him. Our brothers have been sharing about that recently on this matter of holiness and the call to holiness in this day.

As we look at the various groups that we have talked about, you will see that one or more of these may have been emphasized more, but they are all there in one way or another, and we are thankful. Even as we are praying for the Lord to strengthen us individually or corporately, these are some of the matters that we desire would be strengthened within our lives and within our midst. As a result He would receive more glory and honor, and we could be the people He is calling us to.

Lessons From Church History

There are some lessons that we can learn from church history. There is the absolute necessity for revelation of God's heart and purpose. Unless we really see what God's heart and purpose is, we will not go on. We have to see what the end is; we have to see what His desire is. And sadly, throughout church history, within a generation or two, occasionally three generations, most moves weaken, and they become formalized or institutionalized. As God moves, new wine needs fresh wine skins, and we will look at some of that. The materials that are produced are eternal and never lost. When God gained ground back in 500 AD, and we touched life there, the gold that was worked out of the life of Christ is in the eternal city. It is there; it is done permanently, so recovery is progressive. We started at the Reformation with justification by faith and then came into Wesley and Whitfield where you have a little more of sanctification. We came into the Brethren and we saw more of the priesthood of all believers. There is a progression that God did. We do not know what else He has to reveal to us, but we want to be open and teachable in the hours and days that we are living in.

Absolute Necessity of Revelation of God's Heart and Purpose

We will go through each of these now, but there is an absolute necessity of the revelation of God's heart and purpose. We really need to see how He has a desire for that corporate expression of His life. How is a corporate expression strengthened? You cannot strengthen a whole group; you strengthen each individual, so there is a great relationship between individual and corporate. Sometimes we almost separate them, but it is essential. You cannot have a strong corporate expression of His life without a strong expression of His life in individual believers. There is a proverb that says, "I was almost in utter ruin in the midst of the assembly" (see 5:14). Sometimes we can put our security in an assembly. We can say, "I am meeting here, and everybody else is so spiritual they will carry me through." We are thankful how we can meet together regardless of our condition, and as we go through various times and trials, ones are there to help us through. But we need to see how each individual has a calling. "To much has been given," and we have been given much. Therefore, each one of us needs to be faithful of what God has put in our hands, and it will manifest itself in different ways. There is a great diversity there, but it is all in relation to the bride making herself ready. If you do not see that, if you do not see the end, you will give up.

I was talking to somebody the other day about assembly life and the preciousness of brothers and sisters. It is so precious that you cannot live with them, but you cannot live without them. I think anybody who has been in assembly life for a while, and you get upset or irritated, you will begin to think about leaving the assembly. However, if we do not see what it is

all about, if we do not see there is an end in view, that it is not about us, we will quit; we will shrink back. We will say that it is not worth it; I am not going to pay that price. It is like Norman Grubb said in his autobiography, "Once caught, no escape." Have we been caught by this revelation? It is not a doctrine, it is not a teaching. We have to see His purpose, and it only comes by revelation from Him. It is not something that you can be taught; it has to be caught.

We need to be praying for the Lord to open our eyes. Also, that we would not only see it, but we would maintain that fresh revelation and relationship with our Lord Jesus, and not allow this living revelation to simply become a teaching or a tradition. That is a challenge because it is so easy in our humanity just to allow things to begin to enter into a routine and tradition. But God, in His love, will shake it. He wants to wake us up so that we can really be those who are wholly into what He has. Our tendency is for it to become formalized, and it is sad. There is a verse we often quote out of Proverbs: "Without vision people cast off restraint or without vision people perish." Whether you use vision or revelation, without it, we do not see the fulness of God. It is so vital, absolutely vital to see what God's heart and purpose is.

It is not just something we are speaking of in these days. Ones have been speaking of it for centuries. Jon Comenius was with the United Brethren who eventually made the way for the Moravians to come in. This is one of my favorite quotes because he talked about one thing is needful. Remember that this is written a few hundred years back.

"Christendom has become a labyrinth (a maze). What can help? Only one thing is needful (or necessary). *Return to Christ and walk in His life.* There is only one Life, but death comes to us in a thousand forms. There is only one Truth, but error has a thousand forms. There is only one Christ, but a thousand Antichrists.

So thou knowest, what is the one thing necessary? Either thou turnest back to Christ or thou goest to destruction like the Antichrist. *If thou are wise and wilt live, follow the Leader of Life.*"

How relevant that is for us today! Also, our brother John Wesley had a quote about the future of the Methodists, and it is an interesting thing because it actually came to pass. He said:

"My fear is not that our great movement, known as the Methodists, will eventually cease to exist or one day die from the earth. My fear is that our people will become content to live without the fire, the power, the excitement, the supernatural element that makes us great." The fear of living without His life; it developed into a form. It is so vital; that was another century.

William Booth who lived not so long ago, he said, "The chief dangers which confront the coming century will be religion WITHOUT the Holy Ghost; Christianity WITHOUT Christ; forgiveness WITHOUT repentance; salvation WITHOUT regeneration; politics WITHOUT God; and heaven without hell."

We can see this in the modern Gospel that goes forth. It is tragic how so many of these things that they once feared, they saw; these were prophets. And it has come about in Christendom, and we need to make sure it does not come about in our lives.

Within a Generation or Two Most of the Moves Weakened.

That first generation, the ones who were really captured in a fresh way, lived dependent upon the life of the Lord. But when the next generation came in, they started living off the life of that first generation or man and not the Lord. They did not experience the Lord in a freshness as that first generation had. It ended up leading to weakness and eventually to division. Some of the greatest movements that God had were the Puritans, Wesleyans, Brethren, Pentecostalism, but within a few years they all broke up. I thought that the Brethren Movement was one of the great movements of what God did, but within twenty years, there was already division.

I appreciated another quote by Brother Sparks who was never shy about saying what the one thing is—this is the issue! Some people play politically and dance around it. He said:

“The history of all division is the demonstration of one fact: The life and power of the ‘Spirit of life in Christ Jesus’ has been thwarted by the asserting of the self-life: man’s ability, interests, organizing, traditions, and so forth.”

The Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus has been thwarted. Brothers and sisters, we need to allow that Spirit of life in Christ Jesus to stay alive and fresh within all of our hearts and lives and not hinder it in any way. That was one of the ways that Jesus rebuked many of the religious leaders. He said, “You hinder ones from entering in.” We do not want to be those who are thwarting His life, but we want to be those who are encouraging ones to enter in in a fuller and greater way.

We talked about new wine needing fresh wineskins. As God moved along we see how when it comes to this matter of change, ones are so resistant to it because there is a comfortableness in doing what they have always done; they know what they have done.

In the 16th century the Reformation was greatly resisted by the Roman Catholic Church, and ones were put to death and persecuted. It was tremendous the resistance that was put up.

In the 16th and 17th centuries we are thankful for the reformation, but they only went so far, and they ended up establishing state churches, and other beliefs came in. Then the Lord moved and raised up the Anabaptists who wanted to go on further. The persecuted, which was the Reformed Churches, became the persecutors. That happened over and over again throughout the history of Christianity. The persecuted become the persecutors. Even in social life in this country, you have racial discriminations and things like that. 100-150 years ago, who were the persecuted? It was the Irish, then they got settled in, and who became the persecuted? The Vietnamese maybe, the blacks, ones who were persecuted then became the persecutors. It is natural to man, and we need to make sure that within the church it does not happen.

Wesley and Whitfield

Then the Lord raised up a Wesley and a Whitfield in England, and they were too hot. They saw something beyond the walls of the church of England, and they were thrown out. In the 18th Century Wesley ended up being thrown out, and he went to his father’s grave and preached.

Whitfield went to Kingswood near Bristol where he began his open air preaching. He began his preaching to about 200 coal miners. The second time he preached there was 2,000 people assembled to hear him. The third time the audience numbered up to 5,000. The numbers who gathered increased until more than 20,000 people were assembled on the fields to hear this powerful preacher preaching to miners. It was amazing.

Resistance to Hymns

In the 18th century there was a resistance to hymns. We might say, “Why would there be such a resistance to hymns?” But if you think about it, the resistance to hymns is very similar to what happened in our lifetime with the resistance to choruses, but there needs to be a balance there. The big resistance to hymns was that they were written by man and not God. They had been singing from the Psalms, and most of the hymns were written by the dissenters outside of the Anglican Church such as the Wesleys, Newton, and others. They used every day common words; they did not use these high-faulting, religious theological words. They just used words that would communicate to the people, and they were written by common people. The resisters said that hymns led to enthusiasm which was a bad word in those days. The Methodists were first called “Enthusiasts” back then. You could not be too enthusiastic. If you really wanted to insult somebody in those days, you would call them an “Enthusiast.” Today, we wish there were more enthusiasm within the house of God for Him.

Resistance to Mission Work

There was resistance to mission work, and it began when God was beginning to move. William Carey, who was one of the first major missionaries that God used in a wonderful way, was sharing His heart with those whom he met with. He really had a burden for those who were lost, and he wanted to go to places to share his burden. As he was sharing about this, the leadership abruptly interrupted him and said, “Young man, sit down; you are an Enthusiast! When God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do it without consulting you or me, and He can do it without your help.” We think that missions is just going out and sharing the Gospel, but that was a change that brought resistance.

When the Brethren began, there was a change in various independent meetings and the priesthood of all believers. “How can you meet without a pastor? You don’t have somebody wearing a clerical collar. How can these common people preach and share about the Bible?” There is always resistance. There was resistance during our life to the Jesus Movement. “Who are these Charismatics? They are just crazy and fanatic.” And some of them were. We still have Kenny here with us claiming Charismatics. We are thankful how He draws from Charismatics, He draws from the Fundamental Baptists and others, bringing us together, making us one in the experience of the oneness we have in Christ. And lo and behold here we are today. It is wonderful how He works!

This is where you need the Holy Spirit, that fresh relationship with God because you have the truth of contending for the faith, holding for the faith, do not remove the ancient boundaries. Also, God is moving on, and He is revealing more. God is always contemporary in the days we are living in. That is where only the Holy Spirit can reveal His way about how these

two truths end up working together for the fulness of His life to be expressed. That is why we want to have that open teachable heart.

Materials Produced are Eternal

As we mentioned, the materials produced are always eternal and never lost. Before Solomon was born, David was gathering all the materials for the house of God, and there was one particular verse in I Chronicles 26:28 that we can look at ones mentioned and say, "What value are they? What could they have ever contributed?" But I was really convicted by this verse. Look at the ones who had material that went into the temple of God. There was Samuel, then there is Saul. "Wait a minute, he is a man of the flesh. What is he doing there?" Abner, who was head of Saul's army. Joab, and we know how Joab was always causing David trouble. Nevertheless, anyone who had dedicated anything to the house of God went into the care of Shelomoth and his relatives. It is precious to think that people who live these divided lives such as Saul in whom we see a negative side of him, but he had some good characteristics also. We do not know what gold went in. At times Joab would be the biggest problem for David, but in other times Joab spoke the truth, and David did not get it. Joab tried to tell David, "Do not count the people; you do not need a census." Joab had enough sense to know that, but David did not listen, and he paid the price. So there are things within the lives of the people of God that we do not know. Of course, I am not talking about anything of the world coming into the house of God.

So often as we look around, we love to judge things that we see in people, but we have to be careful with that because we do not see the hidden works. We only see in part; we do not know what is going on. But God sees the gold going into the city whenever Christ is exemplified, whenever Christ gains something in our lives, whenever there is a saying, "No to ourself and yes to Him." It is like the register in that city; there is a little more gold going in. Praise God for that!

In Ecclesiastes 3:14 it says: "I know that everything God does will remain forever; (that is just a simple little statement) there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him." These materials produced are never lost, they are gold in the city.

Recovery is Progressive

Also, this recovery is progressive. We mentioned a couple of the progressive ways, but another one of my favorite quotes is an individual by the name of John Robinson. He was sending some of the original Puritans from England to the United States, and he was charging these saints on the boat Speedwell and blessing them, but the Speedwell sprung a leak and they ended up coming over on the Mayflower. He said:

"I charge you before God that you follow me no further than you have seen me follow Jesus. If God reveals more of Him to you by another instrument of His, be ready to receive it as if you would any truth by my ministry. I am persuaded the Lord has much more truth to break forth from His Holy Word."

And that is still true today. We are thankful for what we have received from many who were living and have passed away. But still there is more of Christ to be revealed, and we want to be among those who are seeing that.

Even Brother Nee was speaking of this in the church and the work about what God had done in China. He said:

“The truths referred to in this book have been gradually learned and practiced during the past years. (There was a lot of success there going on. He called the workers together and he knew that the Communists were coming in, and he wanted them to be equipped to carry on. So he was preparing them for this.) But numerous adjustments have been made as greater light has been received, (just remember this) if we remain humble, and God still shows us mercy, we believe there will be further adjustments in the future.”

As more light is seen He will continue to reveal to us what adjustments need to be made. Thank the Lord. Even if we are going to have a sign or not a sign, He will show us what to do, and He answered that for us. Praise God!

Where are We Today?

As we said that Christianity overall is in a weakened condition. We are thankful for the sparks of life we see in many places, but overall, in a general way, it is in a weakened condition. Three Scriptures came into my heart when the people of God were in weakened conditions, and you actually see these same characteristics today. In Judges, which was a tragic time, this phrase is used a few times and at the end.

In Judges 21:25 it says: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

Today you could say, “In these days, our Lord Jesus is not Lord or King, and everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes.” That is one of the great tragedies of the days that we are living in.

In Malachi 2:17: it says, “You have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet you say, ‘How have we wearied Him?’ In that you say, ‘Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delights in them.’”

This verse and also in Isaiah it talks about calling good evil and evil good. It is sad that the things that are evil today are being called good, and the things that are good today are being called evil. As I talk about this, I am not talking about the world; I am talking about within Christianity, and the things that are accepted, the things that are actually endorsed and being boasted about. We can see our condition.

In Revelation 3:17 we see how deceived the church of Laodicea is:

“Because you say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing, and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor, blind, and naked.’”

The tragedy at the end of the Old Testament and the New Testament in Malachi and Revelation, God spoke truth in what their situation was, but they did not know their own condition. The ones in Malachi thought they were fine and said, "How do You love us?" They thought they were doing fine as we read their dialogue back and forth. At the end of the New Testament in Laodicea they said, "We are fine; look we are rich. Everything is going great." They did not know they were blind, poor, naked, and miserable. We do not know ourselves. Now, we do not need to get introspective; that is why we have the Holy Spirit, praise God, One who loves us. We have the cross, we have the blood, and He can adjust and show us our ways.

The days we are living in are His soon return, but I still believe that His eyes move to and fro throughout the earth to strongly support those whose hearts are completely His. He is actively looking for ones. What is He looking for? I love Isaiah 59 which says, "So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west and His glory from the rising of the sun." When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him. We see the enemy coming in like a flood, and that standard is the testimony of Jesus, His life being expressed individually and corporately through His people. That is the standard He is jealous to have raised up in this day and time. Throughout history, when the enemy was coming in like a flood as it did through the dark ages, there was that testimony. There was a bright light shining, and the world did not even see it. They were not noticed by the world, but they were noticed by God. There is gold in that city.

The Last Call to the Churches

In the days we are living in that standard needs to be strengthened. There a little transcript by Brother Kaung called, "The Last Call to the Churches," and it is a call for His people to be strengthened. I forget exactly what the title is, but that is pretty close.

In Revelation 2-3 we find the call to overcome. There is a great call in this hour to overcome. So who are the overcomers? And it is actually one of the most misunderstood things among His people because at times it comes across to people thinking overcomers are some elite group; they are better than others. But no; and I love what Christian Chen said, "The overcomers are ones who are overcome by the love of God." When you are overcome by Him, you are an overcomer.

Brother Sparks said, "Overcomers are ones who are still in the race at the end;" ones who are still pressing on at the end.

Brother Kaung said, "Overcomers are ones living the normal Christian life in times of declension."

They are not super Christians. The level of life has gotten so low and it is declining, but these are ones just simply living a normal Christian life. Think of that remnant that went back in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. They were not perfect, but they had a heart to go back and build the house, and they were living a normal life while everybody in Babylon and even in Jerusalem had begun to live a subnormal life. And it really was not of themselves. What is the

testimony of these overcomers? It is not like they were so great, and saying, “We are doing this, we are doing that.”

Testimony of the Overcomers

Revelation 12:11 says, “They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, (because they recognize they are sinners saved by grace and they mess up a lot.) and by the word of their testimony (it is not their testimony but it is Jesus Christ is Lord; that is their boast.) and they loved not their lives unto death.”

Some of them die a physical martyr’s death, others live a martyr’s life. These are ones who allow the cross to work within them, and these are the ones who together are that faithful remnant who will hasten His return. This is what He is calling us to. He is calling each individual to have an ear to hear.

How do We Overcome Today?

How did our Lord Jesus overcome? He overcame by dying on the cross, the greatest victory in history. How did Paul overcome? He overcame by dying daily. How do we overcome today? We do not overcome by winning, but we overcome by dying. If I look back at history, one of the greatest examples of believers overcoming was how the early church lived under the Roman Empire. And we know that eventually the church prevailed and the empire crumbled. How did the early church handle the Roman Empire? Did they protest? Did they fight? They laid their lives down. The empire saw that there was a testimony in the way they loved one another. We get so hung up on winning today, but the Lord is not interested in winning America; He is interested in winning Americans. He wants believers.

And sadly, one of the ways we can actually hinder the Gospel from going forth is when we become too political and it hinders. There is a way of praying as we see in Timothy, but when the believers or the church begin associating themselves with certain groups, they shut the door of the Gospel to the other people who are not in that group. When we go out and say I am for this and that, whether you are Democrat or Republican, or a certain group who supports one or the other, we are shutting the door to the Gospel for that other group. We do not need to do that. There is a way of overcoming. We are so focused on winning, but our God won by dying. And would that we would be willing to die today.

How did the church in China survive? It was not by defeating Communism, but it was through saints willing to overcome by the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony and loving not their lives unto death. That is how they are winning there. They are winning for Christ by dying. And we need to be those who are having our eyes adjusted to see the great call that He has upon us for the days we are living in.

His Great Promise

How do we die daily? We die by repenting, offering ourselves as that living sacrifice, praying for an ear to hear, and obey what the Spirit says to the churches. He is calling us to have that ear to hear and obey. What is the solid and sure foundational hope that we have within everything

that is going on? It is His great promise. We can look around and be discouraged, but we have His great promise. This is the hope that we have, that He is going to be able to finish and complete everything He does.

Matthew 16:18: "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not over power it.

That is the promise we have. His Word is absolute; it is sure and it gives us a great hope. As we look around at the world it looks impossible, but as we look around at the things of God, in many ways it is amazing that the testimony of Jesus is still alive today. If you look around, it is amazing that the nation of Israel is still around today. His promise is what we have to stand on, and because we see beyond, we see the end of what He is calling us to, we have a hope that is sure and steadfast that will keep us through whatever happens.

As we daily offer ourselves to Him, we would be met by Him and kept by Him. And being available to Him, He will allow us to live in the present. We are called to live in the days we are living in. We are thankful for the past, and we can learn much from the past, but as we live today in the present by His life, by His mercy and His grace, we have that desire to be a testimony unto Him. We can never say, "*We are the testimony;*" we can never say that we *are* an overcomer or we *are* the remnant now." We have a desire to be that, and as we humble ourselves before Him and continue offering ourselves daily to Him, He will be able to work a great work that He has promised He will do, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

Let's pray:

We thank you and worship you Lord for your great faithfulness throughout the history of your church. We worship you Lord that despite the overall unfaithfulness of man, you found ones willing to deny themselves and be a living sacrifice for the testimony of Jesus. As we look around today and see the overall weakened condition of your people, it brings us to tears. Have mercy on us Lord! We pray you would raise up ones whose lives are captured by you and your purpose. May there be ones who have an ear to hear what the Spirit is saying to the church and have hearts to respond to your call. We thank you for the solid and sure hope we have in your precious promise of "I will build My church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." Lord, we desire to be the testimony you desire. We offer our lives to you for you to use us in these last days as you desire, for your glory and honor. Maranatha, come Lord Jesus.