

The Assembly's Early History In Richmond, VA (Part 2)

The Vision

We are thankful to the Lord Jesus for gathering us around Him and Him alone. This is one of the privileges and honors that we have to join with all the angels in heaven around the throne giving glory to God and praising the Lamb. How thankful we are for that! It is precious, brothers and sisters. It is something unfortunately many Christians do not experience, and that is so sad.

Let's pray:

Lord, we do thank You this day for Your great love, that love that was there in eternity past and yet has been manifested to us in this day and to this world. This happened when You indeed offered up Your Son, a living sacrifice on our behalf which enabled us to come out of death into newness of life, a new creation, a new humanity after God instead of the things of man. Lord, we praise and worship You this morning for the lessons, the history and the vision that You gave us together in the early days as we met. Lord, they are such precious memories for me particularly, and today I want to share that with my brothers and sisters not in any way to lift me up or even the assembly here, but that we might gain precious lessons in life from our past experience and history. Lord, we ask that You bless this time. I ask for a double portion of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in Jesus's name I pray. Amen.

Last time I shared on our early history and the vision that the Lord gave to us. I will try to summarize that as briefly as I can so we can go on with the second part this morning.

In the very beginning there were five sisters in Richmond, VA who came together and were hungry and thirsty for the Lord. They were spiritual sisters who had known the gifts of God, who had experienced His provisions, His blessings, and who were standing on the promises of God. Yet they were still hungry and thirsty. And I think that is key for all of us that the Lord would keep us always hungry and thirsty.

They went to a conference in Wabanna in 1966 or 1967, and they heard Brother Sparks, Stephen Kaung, Devern Fromke speak. At that time the Lord began to respond to their hunger and thirst for Himself. They had come into the possession of a book by Brother Fromke, "The Ultimate Intention," and that really impressed their hearts concerning the Lord's eternal purpose as well as a poem by A.B. Simpson "Himself." which shows us the center of all God's desire which is the Son Himself. They were discovering that Christianity was not an ecclesiastical system. It was not just promises and things for me or you but Christianity is Christ Himself. He is the absolute ultimate expression of God, and as Llewellyn Miller put it: "I was crushed upon the Rock of Christ." They came back from those times and felt very strongly in their hearts that the Lord wanted to raise up something in Richmond that was for the Lord Himself. It was not just brothers and sisters gathering together for a time of meeting, but it was to be something that would please Him and His heart totally. Those sisters gave themselves to prayer for five years, and they prayed that the Lord would bring in others, particularly brothers with the same spiritual hunger, desire and vision that the Lord had given them. These sisters were very spiritual in my estimation as well as Kenny's. They were dear sisters in the Lord. They offered themselves as prayer vessels to

the Lord, travailing prayer. And we have to say this morning that it was their travailing prayer that the Lord used to give birth to the assembly here in Richmond a number of years later. For five years they prayed faithfully.

At the same time they had heard Stephen Kaung, who had begun to come to Richmond once a month and would share three ministries each time with these sisters. He encouraged them in their quest for the Lord Himself; he fellowshiped with them and prayed with them.

In 1972 three brothers did show up. They were not mature spiritual brothers by any means. They were young brothers. In fact one of them was Kenny Pittman. At the time Kenny was twenty years old. He had just been saved for about six months in the Assembly Of God Church. Praise the Lord for that! The other one was me and Kenny and I showed up on October 1, 1972. I was saved when I was twelve, and sixteen years later at the age of twenty-eight I came in. Kenny was just bubbling over with the Lord. The life of the Lord was vibrantly manifested in my brother, and I was really drawn to the Lord in him. We worked on the same floor at City Hall where and at lunch time we would get together and share Christ together. I was Fundamental Baptist, and I did not agree with this matter of gifts and tongues, but actually I saw them in Kenny being manifested. Something you may not know is that Kenny spoke in tongues. Of course, where I went I had been taught that those things had passed away with the apostles, which of course, is not true.

That did not deter our fellowship at all. We were just sharing Christ together. I shared a book with Kenny, "The Normal Christian Life, which really brought us to our first great revelation, and that is "Christianity is Christ". It was the revelation of Christ Himself, that Christ was everything, that Christianity was Christ and Him alone, that the whole reason for the universe was Christ, and the reason for redemption is Christ. The reason to bring many sons to glory was for Christ; it was all Christ. I remember Kenny saying to me one day when we were fellowshiping in the park, "Jerry, I see; it is Christ, isn't it? It is all about Christ; it is only Christ." And that is a great revelation that we all need, and I pray that the Lord will forever expand our revelation of Christ Himself. And that was really the beginning for Kenny and I.

What is the Church?

We showed up at the meeting at Llewellyn Miller's house on October 1, 1972. I had been struggling before the Lord because the question in my heart was, "Lord, what is Your church?" I struggled with that greatly, and Kenny also was inquiring, "What is Your church?" That night Brother Kaung spoke on Acts chapter 1, "The Birth of the Church." That was amazing to me because I never knew that the church was born. I always thought it was formed as an organization by men and led by the pastor. Oh, how wrong I was! The church is far from that. And when Stephen shared those famous words it spoke to my heart, I will never ever forget even in eternity. He said, "The church is not an organization; it is an organism that is born. And brothers and sisters, it was like the gates of heaven flooded open to me with light, and my heart was convinced. I had seen not only Christ the Head but Christ the Church.

I do not know if you have ever seen what the church is. Some Christians have been going to meetings for many, many years and have never realized the reality of what the church is. I do not

know if you have discovered it yet, but the church is a Person. It is not an organization, it is not an ecclesiastical system, it is not even a way of meeting. It is a Person, and that Person is Jesus Christ. We discovered that Jesus Christ is the Head in heaven and the church is Jesus Christ on earth manifested and expressed through a corporate expression, the body of Christ, the church. What a tremendous difference it is when you get that point of view of what the church really is when you gather together. Yes, we come, and we fellowship and encourage one another. But when we come together, our heart is to see Jesus Christ, to manifest Christ to one another as we fellowship, and as we gather around the table we worship Him. Christ is in our presence, but He manifests Himself through His body the church. What a great calling the church has!

The Testimony of Jesus

As we continued to meet during those early days, we decided to have a conference. That was in September 1973 which was the first conference at Roslyn, and our brother Stephen shared on the testimony of Jesus: "What is the testimony of Jesus?" That greatly affected us at that time, and it became the purpose of those conferences. We had begun to have our eyes and hearts opened to *the* Christ, Christ the Head and Christ the body. The eternal purpose of God is to bring many sons to glory as a corporate expression that the church might be His effective body upon this earth. It was a tremendous time of enlightenment during those days for us. In the spring of 1974 our brother asked us: "Should we consider becoming a corporate testimony of Christ, standing as the body of Christ? We did not answer that right away. He did not want us to; he wanted us to seriously consider it and pray about it, and we did. We began to gather together, and he shared things of what it meant to gather in the name of Jesus, and if we truly gathered in His name there would be no divisions in the church. That was our heart to truly gather in the name of Jesus, and we met together on that ground. Kenny came from a different background than I did. These sisters came from various backgrounds as well, Episcopalian, some were Charismatic, but we all gathered in His name in the unity of the spirit. We did not gather around trying to decide which doctrines we could agree on; we gathered to meet our Lord Jesus Christ in the unity of the spirit.

In that context, the very ground of the church meeting together was that we receive all; we do not exclude brothers and sisters because they do not quite think like we do or maybe hold some doctrines different than we do unless it is heresy. We received them.

The other point that was really brought home to us is that we are born into the body of Christ. We do not have a membership; we never have because it is not necessary. Whenever you accept Christ, you are born into the body of Christ; you have your place there. These were all important things that we were learning and considering. And we were considering whether we really wanted to stand as a testimony for Jesus Christ on this earth.

During those time that Stephen had asked us to consider becoming a testimony, he came to us brothers, which at that time was Michael Woods, Kenny and I, and he said, "You brothers need to step out and take more responsibility." For me (I can only speak for myself), I did not grasp what our brother was saying. I had no idea what he meant. I knew that he wanted us to be more responsible. Of course, his main idea was for us to become more spiritually responsible, but my response was, "Okay Lord, I will get there early when we meet together and set up the chairs."

And that is what I took up which was not wrong at all. I did not quite see what the Lord had in mind at that time, but I did want to be responsible before the Lord. In those early days that is one of the things I felt that I needed to do. So the Lord leads us in small steps.

Divine Order

I was so excited about everything I was receiving and hearing. It was all new to me, and the discoveries that I was receiving were absolutely amazing in my heart. But frankly, being responsible was not quite on my heart at that time. However, during that time Brother Kaung shared a ministry out of I Corinthians 11 on God's divine order. This was right after the first conference we had at Roslyn, and I want to say a few things about this because I think Corinthians 11 is one of the most misunderstood chapters in the Bible. It has been abused and misused because it speaks of the Headship of Christ. It speaks of when the church is together in action, there is a divine order. It talks about the Head of Christ being God, the head of man being Christ and the head of woman being the man, and people have so misused that. They think it is putting sisters in a secondary place or they are less spiritual than brothers. This is far from the truth, far from what Paul was trying to relate to the Corinthian Church. As you know there was a lot of disorder in the Corinthian Church. Even though they were operating in all the gifts, it was very disorderly. And God was saying that there is an order in the church, a divine order, a heavenly order that should be established. That is what chapter 11 is about—God's divine order. I think we are all aware that we as the church are to be a testimony of Christ, the fulness of the Godhead dwells in Christ, and we are to be an expression of Him, the fulness of Him that fills all in all. That is our responsibility. Not only do we have the responsibility to manifest Christ, manifest His character, manifest who He is, manifest to the world His desire and His plan, it is also that we are to be a testimony to divine order. And the best way I know to share that is to answer the question, "What is that divine order?"

We know that in the Godhead there is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and they are all equal. They are all spiritual, one is not superior to the other. Yet, when it comes to God executing His plan for creation, when man fell to execute His plan of redemption, to execute His plan for bringing many sons to glory, to execute His plan to have a bride for His Son, He set up a divine order. The Lord Jesus Christ said to the Father: "I am not going to cling to My position; I am not going to grasp at it as it says in Philippians chapter 2. He did not grasp His deity. He never gave up His deity, but He did not grasp at all the privileges that He had as deity. He was willing to let them go. He was willing to take a lower place under the Headship of the Father and carry out all of this work that they had planned—the creation, the redemption of man, many sons to glory, the bride for Christ, the future kingdom. All of that required that those three of the Godhead operate in coordination with each other. And of course, the Holy Spirit did that work of communication. Christ humbled Himself and took on the form of humanity even though He had the form of God. Certainly man is much lower, and it says, "He became Man; Son of God, Son of Man." He took that lower place that God's plan and heart could be fulfilled in the heart of the Godhead. And the church is to be a testimony of that.

Let me say something to you, dear sisters. You are not inferior or less spiritual than any brother in our midst. But you have been called to take up the divine order, just as Christ was

willing to take a lower place. Remember He said, “I do not do anything apart from the Father. What the Father says, I do.” In other words, it was a submissive spirit that He had, an obedient spirit, a spirit that we as the church need to manifest, and that is the special privilege of sisters in the functioning of the church in the manifesting of the life of Christ in the church.

Now we brothers also need to humble ourselves, be submissive and obedient don’t we? Christ is our Head. We must be submissive to Christ our head and to Christ when He speaks through other brothers and sisters. By the way, Christ is Head of the sisters as well. So to speak, they have a double covering in the church—Christ their Head and Christ in the brothers as their head. We brothers should take up our responsibility because we are responsible for the church, for the sisters, for the decisions and actions of the church and we will be held accountable.

Brothers, I just want to say that those who take a position in the church as if they have an office, it is so unlike our Lord Jesus. He is Head of the church, but look at how humble He was. He said, “I did not come to be served but to serve.” That is the place of us brothers in the assembly, to serve and to serve everyone. I remember one time Brother Stephen said that in an organization, in a company, it is set up like a pyramid with all the people on the lower tiers serving and working, and the ones on top are being served and giving all the directions. He said, “The church is just the opposite. Those in leadership are at the bottom; they are to serve all.” In the church we are to represent our Lord Jesus Christ as the Head, to manifest Christ as the Head, and we are to manifest His authority. Now that does not mean that we ever become authority. We are not; Christ is always the authority, and that is why we must be humble and submissive as well as being a testimony in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ as Head.

Also, we have to manifest the body in Christ, and Christ the body is mainly more the function of the sisters than the brothers. So I hope that no sister goes away ever thinking that the brothers are superior. I hope no brother ever goes away thinking that they are superior to the sisters or to their wives. No! The function of the sisters is not inferior. We as husbands can testify that we cannot do without our wives. Now some may say that that they can do without them but if we do we are lying. That is why it says in the Bible that two become one. Do you see what the church represents? We are to function as one together. What a great impact that had at the time because it was the sisters who were leading and rightfully so. The Lord raised them up, and what prayer warriors they were! They were mighty ones in our midst, spiritual ones, more spiritual certainly than us younger brothers because we were still in our twenties. We owe so much to the faithfulness of our sisters.

The sisters were still the ones being responsible at that time. Then in June of 1974 the conference came, and in that conference Brother Stephen shared on spiritual leadership, and Lance spoke on the house of God. What tremendous messages they were! I have to say, “Because of Lance’s practical experience in manifesting Christ the church at Halford House in England, it was a great help in those ministries to show us that this was not just Christian doctrine that we were trying to follow, but it was Christ the Head of the church. He made it so living, and it was living, and we gained much from our brother at that conference. At the end of that conference I remember that Lance shared his last message on the house of God and on the bride of Christ. It was amazing! It was so precious because right after that ministry our brother Kenny and Linda

stood up and Stephen married them. So we had such a beautiful expression of what Lance had been speaking.

Spiritual Leadership

Brother Stephen shared on spiritual leadership, which The Lord had given him, and it was much needed because he had been trying to encourage us brothers. I will speak for myself; I do not know if I was responding very well, but I wanted to. The interesting thing was that the first message was on the need for spiritual leadership, and what impressed me so much was that the church is called to have leaders. But our brother emphasized over and over again that it was a matter of function and not a position; we were not trying to obtain a position like a corporation. But we were to function, to step out and to be responsible. In other words, he was calling us all to be responsible, and that had a tremendous effect on Kenny, Michael and I at that time. It pierced my heart, and my eyes were opened finally to what our brother Stephen meant when he said that we needed to take up responsibility.

I understood that he was talking about spiritual responsibility in the manner in which our sisters had been so responsible during those years and so prayerful. I will never forget that day. At that time, I was not staying on campus; I was just coming and going. Oh, the Lord pierced my heart. I immediately went home, got all the things I needed and came back to the campus and tried to help the sisters out as much as I could. They were doing everything. They were registering people, they had sent out the information, they had set up the meeting place, and they met with the Episcopal camp ground to set it all up. They were very responsible.

In response to the Lord's message to us at that conference and the previous message on God's divine order, the three of us brothers went to Stephen and said, "Brother, the Lord has shown us that we need to be more responsible, and we are going to meet once a week to pray for the Lord's will to be done in Richmond like our sisters have been praying. We committed ourselves before our brother that we wanted to be faithful to the vision that the Lord was showing us, to make the Lord the Head of our gathering, and to meet on the ground of the unity of the spirit. We were not to be divisive from other brothers and sisters; we were to function as His body on this earth. We were to be built together to be His house, the place where His presence could be known, to be the priesthood that He desired, a prayer instrument to the Lord, and to be submissive to the cross that He might prepare His bride. That was particularly a major point in my life and in the lives of this assembly here.

A short time later, the sisters began to see that we were taking up that responsibility and we were committed just as they were committed to the Lord to having what the Lord wanted in our midst. They came to us and Brother Stephen, and they said, "Brothers, we want to establish God's divine order in our midst. We want Christ to be everything. We want His fulness to be manifested, so we are going to take a step back and support you brothers. We think of our Lord Jesus taking a lower place that God's work might be accomplished, and that is what we want to do and that is exactly what our sisters did. Even though it was a lower place in a sense, it was a place of exaltation. Paul said in those Scriptures in Philippians that because the Lord took that lower place and was submissive, the Father said, "I have exalted Him above all." It is really a place of exaltation. Anyway, that had a tremendous effect. Then the sisters said, "Not only that but we

are going to meet once a week to pray for the brothers and for the assembly. And I have to say that those two commitments have been kept for fifty years, and it is only the Lord's grace and mercy that has happened. So we owe much to our dear sisters in the Lord.

It was in our heart not to continue to have a meeting just to be together, but we wanted to be built together as a house and to be His body. We wanted to serve His eternal purpose to head up all things in Christ that He might have first place in all things. And the Lord showed us something. He said, "Okay, you are committed now." I received that as it is time to drive the stake. I have driven the stake, and I am not going back; I am going forward from now on.

Three Things the Lord showed Us to Do

There were three things that the Lord showed us to do in order to clarify the testimony of Christ. We needed a place of our own, we needed to change the meeting time from 3:00 in the afternoon, and we needed to establish the Lord's table.

Now I need to say something at this point which is extremely important. Brothers and sisters, we do not think we are special. We are humbled that God chose to express His mercy and grace in such a way to us because we were the least deserving, not because we were anything. The Lord had given us a vision, something that you cannot turn away from. Paul said, "He was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. That is where we were. We did not see ourselves as being special. Yes, we had received some vision that for some reason much of the church had not yet seen, but we pray that it will. I want to be extremely demonstrative in this that we are not special. We are not *the* church; we are a part of *the* church and we try to meet together in the way that the Lord has shown us to, but we are not and can never claim to be *the* church, or ever think that other brothers and sisters who are not meeting with us are separate from us because they are not. They are our brothers and sisters, and we embrace them. May the Lord have mercy.

I remember one time we were talking about what the Lord was doing in our midst, and one of the sisters said that we are Ephesus. The thing about Ephesus was that they loved the Lord so much. And I will never forget what our dear brother, Frank Lifsey, said, "No, sister, we are not Ephesus; we are Corinthians," and he was so right.

Brothers and sisters, if pride ever comes within our hearts, may the Lord quickly deal with it because it is the most devastating thing in Christianity.

A Place to Meet

One of the three things that the Lord showed us was that we needed a place of our own to meet. We were meeting in Llywellyn's garage, and the Lord showed us that we needed to move out; we needed a clear testimony. So we actually rented a space in a community center, Tuckahoe Community Center. It was not very convenient. I remember that the children's classes were held on the stair steps leading up to the second floor because all we had was the first floor which was a very large room which did not work very well, and we knew that the place was not convenient, that it was not the Lord that we stay there. We went from there to the Garden Club on Hermitage Road and met there for a short period. That was better, more space for the kids, but we knew that was not the place the Lord would have for us. But praise the Lord, an ad came up in the

newspaper about a house on Hermitage Road, just down from where we were meeting, an old Victorian house. It is at the corner of Pope Avenue and Hermitage Road. There is a granite archway with the word "Bellevue" on it, "A Beautiful View." Now that had a big impact on me. What better view do we have than Christ? I remember that we went to see the place and we all knew in our hearts as soon as we saw it that this was it. We went up to the attic and stood together and laid claim to that house. We said, "Lord, we do not have the money. We do not have anything much, but we claim this house for You, a physical place that we could meet. We knew we were in the house where the Lord wanted us to meet as a testimony to Him.

At that time in 1975 the house was selling for \$57,000. That does not sound like much anymore, but today's equivalency would probably be in the \$600,000 range. We were just young couples, and young couples do not have money. And they wanted \$11,400 down payment, and I think it was in eight or twelve weeks, which would have been \$150,000 today. Just take a number of young couples meeting together with hardly any funds, but our brother Stephen Kaung spoke on the feeding of the 5,000. The basic message was that you just offer to the Lord what you have like the young boy with his fishes and loaves of bread, and the Lord will break it and multiply. And the Lord filled our hearts with faith. We believed he was going to do it. One of our sisters who did not have much money gave her wedding rings to be sold that we might have that place. There was another sister in our midst who said to me, "Jerry, I knew this was going to happen. I knew the Lord was going to do this, and I have been saving money for these last few years for this purpose, and she gave us \$2,000. Money began to come in. Even our children broke their piggy banks, and they offered it as well. It was a true offering to the Lord. Their parents did not ask them to do it. They had just heard what we were doing and they wanted to be a part of it. It was a precious time in our midst.

The day before the closing when we had to have the money, we were short \$2,000, and that afternoon the \$2,000 came in,, and we got the place. Not long after that we were able to pay for it. We are thankful for the Lord in those early days.

Changing the Meeting Time

Now that we had a place, the next thing was to change the meeting time. This was important because we were meeting at 3:00 in the afternoon, having fellowship and praying, but before men, before the world, they would see it as just another meeting for Christians. We knew we were called to be a testimony of Christ so we said that we needed to meet at 12:00 to confirm the testimony. Now many of the people who were meeting with us at that time were still going to other places of worship in the morning and coming in the afternoon for the fellowship. They loved the fellowship, and they loved the teaching that our brother was giving. We knew that it would have an effect on us, and we decided before the Lord that is what we needed to do to confirm the testimony, and we did. And quite a few of them did stop coming because they were committed in other places, but the ones who had seen what we had seen remained committed. Yes, our size reduced somewhat but the testimony was being confirmed.

Establishing the Lord's Table

One of the main things we did was establishing the Lord's table. We knew that the Lord Jesus was the center of our meeting on Sunday; that is why we gathered together around Him. The Lord's table was to be primary. Yes, we were going to have ministry of the Word, but that was secondary and added on. Our real heart was to meet the Lord around His table, and I thank the Lord that is still our heart even today. So those three things made a big difference.

Corporate Prayer

During those years Stephen Kaung had been sharing with us about corporate prayer, and in the 1977 conference Lance Lambert shared on corporate prayer, and we were involved in that. I remember when we moved to Huguenot Road in 1984 we were really impressed with being faithful to the prayer time, not just coming when it was convenient but coming because it was part of the testimony of Christ and we wanted to be a strong prayer vessel for the Lord. We had been praying together for a while, but you know, when you have those moments before the Lord when something becomes really important to you, and you know you have to make a commitment. That is what happened to me, and interesting enough once I made that commitment, every Wednesday night before the meeting I would get sick. And the enemy was telling me, "Jerry, you need to stay home; after all you are sick." But I knew that was not the Lord, and so each Wednesday night I would head out to the meeting nauseated, but as soon as I crossed the James river which is just north of the fellowship house it went away. That just confirmed even more that it was just an attack of the enemy to keep us from corporate prayer, not praying for our needs but praying for the concerns of the Lord and His needs.

We are a Family

These were lessons that were driven home to us in those days. When we moved to the house on Huguenot road, the Lord opened up even more revelation to many of us of Himself as the Father, God the Father. We were family, and we were beginning to see that we were not just meeting together around the table which was good, and praying together, but that we were His family. It was brought home because when we got here, of course, we needed to take care of the place. We needed to mow the lawn, clean the house, so we had a family meeting concerning these things. It was suggested that maybe we needed to use some of our funds to hire people to cut the grass and clean the house. From a very practical stand point I had been director of maintenance for the Public Housing Authority for many years, and we had hired many different people to come in and clean, but it always ended up in a catastrophe. But that was not the point. The Lord showed us something again, and at the end of that meeting He showed us that we were family and that we needed to take care of the house as a family. That was so important, and those first times we did that, we called them work groups not fellowship groups. We had five or six groups at the time, and we alternated the groups weekly to clean the house and get it ready for the meetings which we have continued to do.

Eventually what happened was that Brother Stephen said, "Every Sunday we come together and have the Lord's table, we have ministry and we go home. Where is the fellowship among the family? And we thought about that and said, "You are right. We need to be family." In the

beginning we actually bought box lunches which we did for a while, but they were just too expensive. It still did not have that sense of family so we said that we would start having each group do a meal on their work day. That eventually developed into the groups that we are now in, fellowshiping together as a family. It was then decided that these groups take up spiritual responsibility for the brothers and sisters in their group, not just the church in general doing it. It was because they are closer together and meet more often, and they know more about each other's needs. So they became fellowship groups instead of work groups. Eventually, we began to have the groups be responsible for the opening on Sunday mornings. So that is how it has developed over the years, just learning to be family together, and it was so precious.

That was an amazing twelve years, and everything was going fine. But in the year 2000 tragically there was a division in leadership. The enemy got us. He got in and divided the leadership and eventually the assembly. Such a tragedy! We still love our brothers and sisters who are no longer meeting with us. And because of the division that occurred, the remaining leadership and even the brothers and sisters went into neutral corners. The war was on; the battle was on. Even in leadership I have to say we drew back. I can say that to you not on behalf of my other brothers but for myself. I know I drew back. I was not taking the lead as I needed to when we were under such great attack. I was reeling from it. I was despondent, I was greatly crushed, and I just did not stand up. I think a fog came over the assembly for almost ten years. In researching our history I said to myself, I wonder if there was anything significant in 2010 that began to bring us out of this fog. I discovered at the conference that year Stephen spoke on the testimony of Christ, the renewing of the vision that we were losing, a recovering. And the fog began to lift, and praise the Lord we are thankful it did.

At the same time, our dear brothers and sisters who were in the Bowling Green area were meeting with us, but we really felt before the Lord that they needed to start meeting on their own. That was in 1990 when they began meeting there. In 1992 they remodeled a house for the meeting place and have been meeting there ever since. However, this division that occurred in 2000 greatly affected them as well, and we did not have any fellowship with the group for a number of years. But praise the Lord, and I shared this with them; I thanked them that they did come back to us and say, "We want to reconcile; we feel like for the sake of the Lord's testimony we need to reconcile," and we did. Praise the Lord! We are thankful that even though we are not faithful at times, the Lord is always faithful. Thank the Lord that He did lift the cloud and restored the vision and leadership. Brothers and sisters, for my drawing back, I ask forgiveness, but at the same time I am so grateful to our Lord Jesus Christ who does not give up on us. The lesson I learned and maybe we should all learn, when the enemy is on attack, do not step back, step up. When the enemy is attacking us, either the fellowship or individually, do not step back, step up. I think that is a lesson we all need to learn. Thank the Lord for what He has done through the years. I am encouraged that tonight we are going to be gathering around that message our brother Stephen Kaung gave in 1981. We had been meeting together nine years when he shared that message.

He said, "What justification do you have for meeting? All that we had learned through the years began to come back. Tonight as we gather, it is my heart and my prayer that we do not receive what we fellowship about tonight as a teaching or as a creed that we follow; it is just the

vision that the Lord gave us and that we need to be faithful to. Once again Paul said, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." And whatever the Lord shows you, do not be disobedient to Him; be faithful.

Lord, we just want to thank You for Your faithfulness through the years. Lord, I say it once again, it is not because we deserve anything but because of Your great grace and mercy that You wanted to express in weak vessels. It is all to Your glory, not ours. No glory at all for us, but only for You, Lord Jesus. You are the One who did it, You are the One who initiated it, You are the One who raised us up, You are the One who brought us together, and when we were divided, You healed and brought back. Lord, what a merciful God You are. You have demonstrated Your faithfulness and mercy in vessels that are so weak. Lord, we come to You and I ask particularly for tonight as we gather together that these words will once again be living in all of our ears and have a spiritual impact upon all of us, that we might stand up and say, "Glory to God for the great things that He has done. In Jesus' name. Amen.