

Finishing the Course

Let's pray:

Lord, we are here before You this morning. We stand before the Almighty. We stand before our Apostle and High Priest. We come before Your throne by Your precious blood. We thank You that that blood has made a way and an accessibility to God Himself. Lord, we pray this morning as we come that we would have ears to hear, that You would in Your grace and mercy speak to our hearts this morning, Lord. We just want to meet with You this morning, encounter You. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

I would like to read three Scriptures all by the Apostle Paul.

II Timothy 1:9: "He who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in the Lord Jesus Christ before the world began."

Philippians 3:12: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect, but I follow after if that I might apprehend that for which I also am apprehended in Christ Jesus."

II Timothy 4:7: (This is Paul's letter just before he was to be martyred.) "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."

All In

Brothers and sisters, that which is on my heart this morning is finishing the course, being all in to finish the course. Paul said that he had been called with a holy calling, a calling that had been determined by God even before the foundation of the world. Every one of us sitting in this room and those who may be listening have a holy calling. That is a calling from God Himself, a special calling, a specific calling for you. Each one of you have been called by the Lord Jesus Christ. Our part is to respond to that calling, and how important it is for your life to know what your life is all about. And once you grasp it, you will be able to in some way comprehend that a holy God has called you with a holy calling. Everyone who is born again has a calling given by God, but we know that all do not fulfill their calling. All do not even come into their calling, very sadly. And that is what is on my heart this morning, finishing the course, being all in, fulfilling our calling in Jesus Christ so that at the end of our life we may be able to say with Paul: "I have fought the good fight, because there is a great fight involved in fulfilling your calling. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."

Brothers and sisters, here lately, in this year particularly, since I had the heart attack, it has been on my heart, and I have been wrestling with it over this past year about finishing the course, about fulfilling my calling in life. I know I am called to be a husband, a father, and many things, but there is that spiritual aspect to the calling of apprehending what we have been apprehended for in Christ. As I was wrestling with this a few months ago I had to say, "Lord, am I still apprehending? Am I still pursuing? Am I still in the fight? Am I still on the course or have I sat

down on the curb? Have I just settled down and become satisfied? And will I finish my course? I wrestled with those things, and I think it has become more true since my heart attack. Not only that, but I am rapidly approaching eighty years which according to the Bible, if you reach seventy years, you are doing really well, but if you get ten more, that is the mighty grace of God. So I wonder sometimes how close to the end of the grace do you get. Now I do not want to be negative; I do want to be positive, but I have been wrestling with these things, so this was on my heart.

I was at the gym one day and thinking about these things. When you are at the gym, you are pumping weights or some other exercise. But that particular day I was not into it. I think all of you who work out know what that means. You just do not feel like doing it. You get to the gym or if you do it at home, and you say, "I just do not want to do this today." But I was there, trying to lift the same weights I had been lifting before, and I was just struggling with it. As I was doing that, there was a young man that walked past me, and on the back of his shirt were the words, "All in." "That is what it takes, Jerry, you have to be all in." And I am thinking, "Okay, Lord, all in; that is what it is about." I am approaching eighty, but am I still all in?

Discipleship

At the same time this was going on, we were also in our Friday night fellowship Bible study considering Luke 14:25-34. We are going to read those shortly, but I just want to remind you what it is about. The Lord is challenging those who were following Him about discipleship. And He told them that to be a disciple you have to be willing to bear the cross. He talked about building a tower, and this really caught me when He said, "You need to count the cost to see if you have enough to finish it." He goes on to say, "There is a great warfare involved, and you need to be willing to forsake all in order to overcome and finish. Lastly, He speaks of salt that loses its savor, it is worthless, useless. But in this word He is saying, "To be worthy of the kingdom you need to have a strong savor in the salt." So I am exercising and struggling with all of this, and I see that word "all in." Interesting enough, he showed up one more time a week later, which kind of reinforced it, and I have not seen him since. But what it said on his shirt has stuck with me.

Luke 14:25-35: "And there were great multitudes with Him, and He turned and said to them, 'If any man come to me and hate not his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yea, and even his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."

Unless you hate all these loved ones, you cannot be My disciple. Then He said to explain Himself, "And whosoever does not bear his cross and come after me cannot be My disciple."

First He talks about hating, and then He talks about bearing the cross. He said, "You cannot be My disciple otherwise. There is no need to try to follow Me. Then He goes on to say to give a little more explanation.

"For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have *sufficient* to finish *it*? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish *it*, all that behold *it* begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish." It is counting the cost to be sure that you can finish.

“Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand (double the amount)? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.” Here is another challenge, counting the cost and forsaking everything.

Then He goes on and uses the illustration of salt. He said, “Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; *but* men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

Brothers and sisters, at this point, He had performed many miracles, and there were great crowds following Him. So it could have been thousands that were following Him. And the Lord turns to them and says, “Except you hate all those you love, even yourself, you cannot be My disciple.”

Then He said, “You must take up the cross in order to follow Me.” Do you understand their concept of the cross at that time? We know what it means now because even though the cross was 2,000 years ago, we understand the spiritual principle behind it, but these crowds did not know that. They did not realize that He was going to the cross. Their concept of the cross was that of a thief or a murderer carrying his crossbeam up the hill of Golgotha and there to be crucified as a murderer. Brothers and sisters, how could they understand such difficult and hard words? And we must also ask, “Why would the Lord say such things? It is almost as if He is trying to discourage them from following Him, from being His disciples. Why would the Lord do this?”

You all might remember another time the Lord said, “Unless you drink my blood and eat my flesh, you cannot have eternal life.” And many left Him. Why? Why would He say such difficult things? Because the Lord is not just interested in filling up heaven with a lot of people. That is not the Lord’s heart. He is looking for those who will give up everything to follow Him. He is looking for those that are serious about following Him. He is looking for those who are serious about fulfilling His purpose for them and for Himself. He is looking for those that will give their all, even their very lives to follow Him. That is how serious discipleship is in the Lord’s eyes.

Brothers and sisters, I think at times we do not appreciate the call to discipleship. I think most of us remember being baptized here many years ago, and what was the reason? We said, “We want to follow Jesus. We want to be His disciple. We want to learn from Him. We want to grow in the Lord.” But at that time, did we really consider the cost? Did we really understand what the Lord was calling us to? The Lord is looking for true disciples, not just those who just want to hang out and enjoy Him or to maybe get some blessing from Him or have a miracle performed by Him or to follow Him when it is convenient to them. No, He wants disciples who are all out for Him, and that is what we have been called to.

Counting the Cost of Discipleship – the Cross

What is the Lord saying in these Scriptures? He is saying, “I want you to count the cost; I want you to really consider.” And I would say this, that even though we have been Christians for a long time, it is always good to sit down and reconsider what God has called us to, the life that He has

called us to. And He said, "I want you carefully to consider what you are committing yourself to. Are you willing to take up the cross in your life? Are you willing to forsake all, even your very life to follow Me? Are you willing to serve My purpose and build My tower? Are you willing to be a soldier in the warfare over My name and My eternal purpose? Your life needs to be salty, full of the savor of Christ. This is what it takes to be His disciple. This is what it takes to be all in, brothers and sisters. These are strange words, difficult words, disconcerting words to understand. I think for those who were following Him at that time, even the disciples, how disconcerting this may have seemed to them.

But there are always something in the words of our Lord Jesus that carried weight that people did not understand, but they would say to Him, "Lord, You have words of life; they are living." Some were able to hear; some had hearing ears, even though they may not have understood.

Does He really expect us to hate our loved ones, and even ourselves to be His disciples? Does He? That is what the Word says, the literal interpretation. Does He really want us to take up the cross and follow Him? Does He really want us to go the way of Calvary? We love His blessings, but the only way to receive a crown is to go the way of the cross. It is the way of the cross that leads to the crown.

What is He really saying? I think the way to explain this Scripture is to consider the wedding feast at Canan of Galilee, which our brother recently shared on. You remember that His mother came to the Lord and she said, "Jesus, they have run out of wine." She must have had some good bit of responsibility for that feast or at the very least the people were very good friends. She had been invited to the feast, and she was concerned because the feast was going to fail because they had not completed the feast, and they were already out of wine. So she came to the Lord and said, "They have no wine." Jesus' response is very telling. He said to her, "Woman, what have I to do with you? My hour is not yet come." Now some think that was a rebuke; I do not happen to believe that. That word "woman" that He used means "little woman," a term of endearment actually, but the Lord's main concern was not pleasing His mother nor gaining favor from His mother by fulfilling her request. His heart was on the Father, and this is what He said, "My hour has not yet come. I cannot move based on what others feel like I should do or on others' motives. I have to please the Father, and everything I do is that I move out at the word of the Father." So pleasing the Father is what governed our Lord's life, even if it meant disappointing His mother. As you know, that happened to be the first public miracle and John calls it the first sign; it was more than just a miracle. This water being turned into wine represented resurrection life that He was moving in.

What do you do when your close friends or even your relatives or your wife or husband wants you to do something that you know is not the Lord's will? He has not asked you to do that. Now, what are you going to do? Are you going to please the Lord? Are you going to follow the Lord? Or are you going to just please those around you whom you love? That becomes a cross. When the will of others or your own will goes contrary to the will of the Lord, that becomes a cross in your life.

It is interesting that in the life of our Lord, He would not move or be moved by any motive or consideration, but by the directive of the Father. Many motives and actions were proposed to our

Lord. Remember when His earthly brothers said, “Hey, look, You need to go up to Jerusalem and expose Yourself and let everybody know who You are.” And He said, “No, My time is not yet.” It was not the Father’s will. He did go up, but He went in secret.

Remember when Jesus was on the cross, there were mockers saying, “Come down from the cross, and we will believe who You are. We will believe You are the Son of God, so prove it.” But He did not come down, because if He had come down off that cross and proved who He was, today we would be lost. We would be without Christ. We would be eternally in hell. But the Lord has brought us into Himself. So thank the Lord, the Lord moves only by the will of God.

But that becomes a cross many times in our lives. Even the word “discipleship” means “to be trained.” You will be disciplined, and the Lord is disciplining us all through the work of the cross in our lives in order to be transformed into His image and to be that testimony of Christ, to be able to fulfill the calling which He has called us to, and to apprehend what Christ has apprehend us for. The cross is always a choice; it is not something that you are compelled to do. Taking up your cross is always going to be a choice. When the will of God and your will or family or friends’ wills are contrary to God’s will, at that point you have to choose. The cross is there, but are you going to choose it? Or are you going to please others and avoid the cross? I think it is very interesting what Elijah said to the people when he was upon Mount Carmel: “How long will you halt between two opinions? If the Lord be your God, follow Him, but if Baal then follow him. It is a matter of choice.

So what is the Lord really saying to us in all of this? I think He is saying, “If you want to be My disciple, you must choose Me above all else, above all loves, even love for yourself. I must be your first love. I am your first love. You must be willing to completely put yourself in My hands—your life, your possessions, your family, your work, everything, all in my hands, completely and without reservation.” That is the cost of discipleship. That is the cost of being able to finish the course.

There is another saying that I know we have all heard, very common. “If He is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all.” That is what we have been called to. And this is a very serious thing; that is why the Lord was so adamant. You need to count the cost. You need to consider it. Are you going to be able to finish? Well, He uses three illustrations to help us.

Building the Tower

First He talks about building a tower, that you need to count the cost to see if you will have enough money to get all the materials to finish the tower. Brothers and sisters, here is the problem. It is possible to lay the foundation and not be able to finish your course. All of us here have probably laid the foundation in Christ; I think we are all believers here in our Lord Jesus Christ; we have accepted Him as our Lord and Savior. The foundation is there, but are we going to finish well? This is a neat story because you may not realize that you are building a tower. Do you know the significance of the tower in the Bible? I think all of us would remember one tower in particular, which is Babel, the tower of Babel. And what is the significance? Now I know that the Lord came in and changed their language and confused them, but that is not the significance.

In Genesis 11:4 it says, “And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top *may reach* unto heaven (and this is the key); and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad

upon the face of the whole earth.” With this great high tower it will cause people to want to come here, and we will be lifted up. We want to make a name for ourselves here. Brothers and sisters, is that the tower you are building in your life, a name for yourself to be looked upon as something great?” Even in the spiritual realm, unfortunately our motives sometime are to do this. We want people to notice us, we want people to recognize us. These things are very, very dangerous. It is the Babylonian way; it is the way of Babel. Did you realize that we are here to build a tower? And this proverb will clear up what I am talking about.

Proverbs 18:10: “The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run into it and they are safe.”

The name of the Lord is a strong tower. We are, as Christians, to build a tower; as the body of Christ we are to build the tower. It is a testimony to His name. That is what the tower is all about, a name for our Lord where He is honored, where He is looked to, where many are drawn to that tower. Now we are building that tower today in our lives individually and in our corporate life together. We have laid the foundation, but are we able to finish?

Brothers and sisters, the Lord is very clear. He is saying that just laying the foundation is not enough. Even getting fifty percent of it built is not enough. Even ninety-nine percent is not enough. He wants us to finish. We can become passive, we can become satisfied in our life, we can become like the church in Laodicea who thought everything was fine, everything was great, and they quit pressing on. I like what was said this morning in considering Him, we need to press on. We cannot fall back. We cannot sit on the curb, even if you are eighty years old. Brothers and sisters, you just cannot sit down. I praise the Lord that our brother Stephen who was 107 was in there right to the end. But that was to glorify God. It was God’s great grace in that man, not the man himself. We are all in to the finish. Are we all in?

Abraham’s Calling and Finishing the Course

Let me use another illustration that will maybe help you understand where I am headed. An example is Abraham. Remember in Acts 7 it says that the glory of God appeared to Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia. Then it says, “He went out not knowing where he was going; He was looking for a city that has foundations.” In order to do that he became a stranger and a pilgrim on this earth because the glory of the Lord had appeared to him. The Lord had shown Himself to Abraham. It was glorious, a glorious beginning.

We remember the history of Abraham. His father was actually a worshiper of idols. We do not know for sure if Abraham was, but he grew up in that family and most likely he was. But the Lord of glory appeared to him even in that condition, and it changed his life forever. He went out not knowing exactly where he was going, but he was headed to the promised land. That was about a 1,200 mile walking trip in those days with his family and the tents, cattle and sheep. They were on a trek of 1,200 miles. That is about the distance from New York City to Miami, Fla. But something happened. Did they get there? On the way they found this little nice comfortable place called Haran, which was halfway there. They settled there, and from the word you cannot tell exactly how long, but it appears they were there a number of years.

After Tera, his father died, God sent Abraham to the promised land. The Lord of glory appeared to him once again. What was the problem? Why was it that the Lord waited until Tera died? Well if you read the end of Genesis 11 you will discover that when Abraham went out it was really his father who was leading them out. It was his father who was in charge, not Abraham. The Lord had told him to leave his family, but his family went with him. In fact his family was leading him, and that became a problem. It became a problem because about half way there, Tera, who represents our old man, our flesh, just got tired. He decided this was a good place to rest, and not only did they rest there, but they settled there. They were really quite comfortable at that place. And it was not until God in His sovereign love and mercy, after the death of the old man that his grip on Abraham was loosed, and the Lord sent him on to the Promised Land."

Abraham was all in, wasn't he? But it was not because of Abraham's determination; it was because of the grace and mercy of the Lord that he went on. It was because the Lord appeared to him with a fresh revelation of God, and he was able to go on.

Finally, the Lord asked of Abraham after he had been in the promised land, to offer up his only son, Isaac, on the altar. Was Abraham still all in in following the Lord at that point? It was a three day trek to where Isaac was to be sacrificed, so he had plenty of time to consider what was going to happen. Was Abraham still in at any cost, even his own son's life? In fact, it was the cost of the very one through whom God had promised that a great nation would arise from him. Did he understand what God was doing? I am not sure, but I do know this, at this point in his life he believed in God. He had to have a close relationship with God in order to be willing to do such an act of sacrificing his own son. Was he willing to sacrifice his all upon God's Word for the sake of God fulfilling His purpose? And we know, praise the Lord, that he was, and he finished the course.

No Holding Back

The next example he talks about a king going to war. First it was building the tower, are you able to finish? Then he is talking about going to war, and this king has a force of 20,000 coming against him, but he only has 10,000 troops. And I think he is probably thinking in his mind, "Should I send all 10,00 out or maybe just send 5,000 to see what can be accomplished. I will hold some in reserve in case they overwhelm us and we have to retreat." Brothers and sisters, if we hold something in reserve, we will be defeated. The Lord said, "You must be willing to sacrifice all; you have to put it all on the line. That was Abraham's challenge in the end, but he said to us as his disciples. "You cannot be half way in this thing. You have to be willing to sacrifice your all." That is discipleship.

Remember that the Lord Jesus Christ, our Apostle and High Priest, went this way, the way of the cross to Calvary. He sacrificed His all for us. He is our example of the life He wants us to live. We must be willing to sacrifice all or we are not going to complete the course. It is that simple. Going back to that little saying on the back of that young man's shirt, "All in."

Salt Losing Its Savor

Then the Lord speaks of salt, but it is not just the salt; he talks about the salt losing its savor or its taste. Now I want you to be aware that there are different interpretations to this portion of

Luke. So what I am going to share with you this morning is what He revealed to me. I will not call it the right interpretation, but at least it is the way I see it in the Lord as I read these Scriptures.

In Matthew 5:13 it says, "We are the salt of the earth." It is not speaking of unbelievers; it is speaking of us. We Christians are the salt of the earth. And when He speaks of savor it means taste. When we were discussing this in our Bible Fellowship, the sisters informed me that you put a pinch of salt in just about everything. I said, "I have heard that, but what is the purpose?" And they said that it actually enhances the flavor of the food. That makes sense, a little bit of salt brings the flavor out. Actually, I tried putting a little bit in my coffee, and it worked. It did seem to have a little more flavor. Now if you put too much in there, all you are going to taste is salt. The savor is what is so important.

What is that savor? All Christians have a special taste that non-Christians do not have, no matter how nice the people are. There is something about the savor of Christ that the world does not have. And that is what people recognize. How is that savor developed? That savor is really the character of Christ in your life. The more of the character of Christ that is built into your life, the stronger the savor. So savor is very important. It becomes your testimony and the testimony of the church. But we know that savor can be diluted. In fact, the sister informed me that if you let the salt gets wet, you might as well throw it out because it is not going to be any good. It is not going to serve its purpose. So salt can be diluted; it can be watered down.

Now how can the savor of Christ in our life be diluted? I think that it is pretty obvious. It may be through sin in our life, it can be through our love of the world more than the love of the Lord. It might be the love of ourselves getting in the way of the love of the Lord. The world recognizes that savor of Christ, but if that savor has been greatly diluted in our life, the world will also recognize that. As a result, we will be despised and criticized as being a hypocrite. And we have all probably had people challenging us in that way in our lives at times. So the savor can be lost.

The Kingdom Age

The Lord said, "When the savor is lost, the salt becomes useless." But He says something a bit strange. He says that it is not good for the land or the landfill. What does this land represent? I do not think it represents the world itself because you know if you salt your garden it is going to kill everything in it. I think the land represents the kingdom age, and as we know the great thing about the kingdom age it is the age of reward. It is the place where the Lord rewards those who have been faithful disciples to Him, those who have given up all for Him, those who have followed Him wherever the Lamb goes. It is those that please Him, those who are serving His purpose. It is the overcomers; it is the five wise virgins, it is the first fruits, those who are under the altar. These are all salt with savor; they are good for the promised land, and they are those who will reign and rule with Christ in His government over the nations during the kingdom age. During that 1,000 years there will be other nations here on earth, and the nation of Israel will actually become the sharers of the gospel with the other nations. But it appears to me that those who go into the kingdom age will actually participate in God's government over the nations. That will be quite a privilege and honor and a reward for those who have been faithful, those who are all in.

So what is this landfill? The landfill is where you throw things that are useless, they have no value to you anymore. You would think that that would be the perfect place to throw salt that has lost its savor, wouldn't you? It is valueless now. But the Lord is very clear to me that we Christians are the salt of the earth. So what is this landfill? I think it is hell, but Christians are not going to go into hell; they have been saved by Christ. He is eternally faithful to keep us, so it is not a matter of losing your salvation. Then who are these Christians who have lost their savor? You remember the Word of God talks about the judgment seat, and it says that your works will be tried as by fire. And for some Christians their works will be burned up because they were not out from Christ. They were not serving His real purpose. But they themselves, though they are tried by fire and their works burned up, will be saved. That sounds like savorless salt to me. The savor is no longer there, but the salt is still salt. It represents those whom we would call barely saved. I think it represents the five foolish virgins who have oil, but they do not have the extra oil needed for the kingdom. It is the fruit that is not quite ready at the right time. These will not receive that reward of reigning and ruling with Christ during the kingdom age. The savor is lost, thus they will not receive that honor and privilege. And the Lord says, "I am going to cast them out, and they will be weeping and gnashing their teeth, tears of regret." This is not hell; they just will not be able to participate with Christ during that time. Now the Word does not say a whole lot about this because the emphasis of the Word is being ready, isn't it? It is being ready when Christ returns. Watch and pray that you might be ready when He returns.

What is going to happen? At the end of the 1,000 years, we see in the Word the new Jerusalem coming down, and all Christians will be in there. The new Jerusalem will be without spot or wrinkle, and that means all Christians will be without spot or wrinkle.

Philippians 1:6 says, "What good work He has begun in you, He will complete it." And I believe that during these 1,000 years those who did not enter the kingdom age will actually be furthered disciplined, learn the way of Calvary, the road of the cross, and they will be restored. Their savor will be restored. Now you may not believe that, and that is okay. But I am so thankful that the Lord always achieves His purpose in every Christian. But what we are called to look forward to is finishing the race that we might be among those in the kingdom age who will be with our Lord Jesus. They will be serving Him in His government over the nations. The Lord has challenged us, brothers and sisters, to be His disciples. It is almost impossible, but this is what He expects. He even demands it! He said, "Take up your cross."

Well, I have been counting the cost, and I have to wonder, Lord, am I going to finish? I do not know how each one of you brothers and sisters are feeling, but the Lord says, "With Him all things are possible." I have to challenge us all, "Do we believe that?" Often when we look inward at ourselves, and we say, "Lord, I am not sure that I am all in. I am not sure I will finish my course. I do not know if I am just resting here or am I retreating from what You have called me to. You have a great purpose for my life, and I want to finish it."

The Valley of Dry Bones

Do you believe that He can do that in you? That is a great challenge because we live by faith, don't we? When I was thinking about these things, I wanted to give a word of encouragement, and I thought of the valley of the dry bones (see Ezekiel 37). Do you ever feel like a dried-up bone?

Actually it was a fallen army, and the bones were in this valley where they had fallen. They had been scorched by the sun for years, and they were completely dried up of all moisture. There was no hope for them of ever being anything but dry bones. But the Lord said, "Do you think these dry bones can live again?" And Ezekiel looked at the Lord and said, "Lord, You know." And the Lord said to Ezekiel to prophesy to them, and the bones began to move together. And we have that famous old song, "The knee bone connected to the thigh bone." Those bones began to move together, and flesh began to come upon the bones. Then the Lord sent the wind throughout those restored soldiers, and the Spirit came upon them, and they once again became a great army. I am saying that to say, that with God all things are possible. The Holy Spirit can raise us up.

Visions of the Lord of Glory

What was the real secret of being able to finish the course. Brothers and sisters, remember this: The Lord of glory appeared to Abraham and he went out, and he finished his course. The Lord of glory appeared to him again in Haran, and a number of times He spoke to him.

Brothers and sisters, it is the appearing of the Lord Jesus in your life that causes you to go on. It is that vision of the glory of the Lord. May the Lord give us all a glimpse of a vision of His glory and continual visions of His glory. Consider well, Him, looking off unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith.

The Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush; His glory appeared to him there. Ezekiel lived in dark tragic times. The nation of Israel had been taken into captivity by Babylon, so he had been captive for five years. He had to have been tremendously discouraged, but the Lord of glory appeared to him, and he saw the chariots with the wheels within wheels. The Lord of glory appeared to him a number of times. Oh, what great prophecies that came from Ezekiel on the restoration of the nation of Israel and of the coming King! It was because he got a glimpse of the glory of the Lord. In Ezekiel 1 it says, "The heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God."

In Paul's beginning he hated Christ. He hated all of His followers and was even throwing them into jail. He had Stephen stoned to death, but later in his life he said, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ," (Philippians 3:7-8). That was who he was pursuing. That was what he was pursuing. And at the end of his life he was able to declare: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course." What changed this man Paul from a hater to a lover, to one who followed after Christ, who was willing to give all that he might gain Christ, who was able at the end to be able to say, "I finished the course"? We know what changed him was the vision of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, on the Damascus Road when He met Paul there in that brilliant light of glory. It changed Paul forever.

Brothers and sisters, his visions did not end there. The church at Antioch heard a voice from the Lord to send out Paul and Barnabas while he was there among the brothers. He received the Macedonian vision to go over into Macedonia, although he was intending to go somewhere else. He was taken into Paradise; he was lifted to the third heaven. It was the glimpses of the glory of the Lord that kept our brother going that made him able to finish the course. May we see Jesus.

Lord, we just come to you today. When I look at myself, I say, "Lord, there is no way." I do not know if I could call myself a disciple, but Lord Jesus, I look at You. I look off unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of my faith, the Completer of the course already. You have gone ahead of me, Lord. You have gone ahead of all of us, Lord, on this course. You understand it well. You know how to succor those that are on this course. But Lord, today we want to declare to You that we want to finish the race. We want to finish well. Lord, we want to be able to say like Paul, "I fought the good fight, I have finished the race." Lord Jesus, how we need to see You. And that is our heart's cry today for another glimpse of Your glory. Lord, that is what keeps us, that is what strengthens us, that causes us to go on. Lord, that is what raised the dry bones. We just look to You. May You be merciful to us this day. Visions of the glory of the Lord that I have mentioned seem so large, but I am not talking about that, Lord. Sometimes it is just the still small voice that shows us something of Yourself. Consider well, Him. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.