

Back To the Beginning

Let us pray.

Lord, we thank You for this chance to be gathered, drawn together around You. We thank You for the time at Your table, and we do not take it lightly. We do not take it for granted. We pray You would give us grace for a few minutes here this morning. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Introduction

The closer we get to the end, the more we need to go back to the beginning. So going back to the beginning is not a bad thing, it is not. "Those old guys are just going back to the old stuff." It is not; it is the beginning, it is always new, and it is always fresh. The closer we get to the end, the more we need to go back to the beginning. Who said that? T-Austin Sparks.

Titus 3, starting in verse 4: "But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His great mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior." And that is back to the beginning.

Purpose of Christian Family Conference

What we wanted to do today was realize that the 50th Christian Family Conference is about to begin five days from tonight: Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, five nights. We come back and load the truck next Friday. It is always good when we are doing something, any activity we are doing, to stop and think about why we are doing it. We can get in habits and just keep doing things. But there is a purpose behind why we are having this conference. I want to reflect on the burden and the spiritual purpose for this conference.

Personal Testimony

When I had a job, my job was in accounting and finance; and it very frequently had to do with new computer systems, accounting systems based on a computer. And the computer people always wanted to start writing stuff, and they just wrote stuff. And then I had to tell them it did not work, I could not use it.

We must always get the big picture. We must always understand why we are doing something and where we are headed. We really need to understand where we are and where we are headed, that is the big picture. That was one of my nicknames, "Big Picture."

So, today I wanted to give you my personal testimony about these conferences. My big picture. The conference started in the 1970s. The first conference was '73, and then '74; but those were not family conferences, the first family conference was 1975.

The Purpose of Our Calling

During the late '60s and early '70s, there was a big move of the Spirit in our country. And I think a number of us got saved during that period. We were called, and washed by the blood, and born again in the Spirit to a living hope. We received a living hope, and at the same time, this living hope was with a purpose.

And we began to see that there was a purpose. It was not just for us. God called us for a reason with a purpose. We were born again into the body of Christ. God saved us into the body of Christ.

Who remembers New Wine magazine? There was a group of brothers in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, who published this magazine. Their magazines are still online if you want to look them up. The men all had short hair, coats and ties, and white shirts. That is how long ago it was. The other thing that was going on then was Charismania, a charismatic movement.

At that time, one of the things that group really ministered on was the body of Christ. That we were born into the body of Christ and are a spiritual expression of Christ through His body. They were very clear, and that encouraged me a lot.

And during the same time, Stephen Kaung would travel to Richmond, Virginia once a month and share some of these same things with a group of people that met at Llewellyn Miller's house in the garage.

The things he was sharing are the things that Paul shared: summing up of all things in Christ; being His body, a body that is always maturing; becoming the bride of Christ, making a way for the marriage supper of the Lamb; and to bring in the kingdom. Way more than small things, way more.

Eternal Purpose

And Paul says in Ephesians 3:11, "This was in accordance with the eternal purpose of God which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord." He uses the word "eternal purpose." There is a lot of eternity in the Bible. These things are not old; they are forever new. And they are always growing, they are always growing.

The reason for this conference is to share something of God's purpose, His reason in saving us. And these things go from eternity past to eternity future, that is eternal. And in the middle is time. We are living in time. This dispensation, the period we live in, is time. And so, what we are going to talk about is what we are doing in time.

Relationship to God's Eternal Purpose

What are we to be doing in light of God's eternal purpose? Having eternity in our hearts, what is our relationship to God's eternal purpose? And I would finally like to say a few things about Peter's experience. You think of Paul, about the ministry of the eternal purpose. But Peter, I believe he was right in the middle of it. I can identify with him.

Eternity Past

So, eternity past. Does anybody ever think about eternity past? Well, when I was a kid, maybe 11 or 12, I used to go outside at night to look at the summer skies. Where I was from, in August, there were shooting stars. Just go out and lie on the ground and wait. You know, as soon as you saw one, it was gone. But I would think, where does the universe end? Impossible. I cannot comprehend.

We cannot understand eternity, but we believe that God has put eternity in our hearts. So, a couple of verses on eternity past. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Genesis 1:1. "In the beginning," John 1:1-4, I think is great. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." The Lord Jesus has always been with the Father.

So, this, when we talk about eternal purpose, it has always been in the Father's heart. And then in Ephesians 1:3-4, Paul says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, ..." Think about it. We are bound up in eternity. And if we just think about where we are today and all our problems, we have our perspective off. We need to think about the Lord.

And I just want to share one thing. Let us see that God has an eternal purpose, and that purpose is centered in His Son. Not in you and me, not in each one of us.

Eternity Future

Eternity future. Just a few verses from Revelation. My favorite is Revelation 11:15. "And the seventh angel sounded; and there arose loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.'" He will reign for eternity.

And let us look at Revelation 21:1-2. "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband." Bringing in eternity.

So, the closer we get to the end, the more we need to go back to the beginning.

Present Time

So here we are, we have this present time. This is a dispensation that God has ordained for the bride to make herself ready, for preparing for the Lord's return. But I really want to stick on this eternity in the heart of man and read from the Amplified Bible. They put more explanations written in the text. Ecclesiastes 3:11, "He has made everything beautiful and appropriate in its time. He has also planted eternity [a sense of divine purpose] in the human heart [a mysterious longing which nothing under the sun

can satisfy, except God]—yet man cannot find out [comprehend, grasp] what God has done [His overall plan] from the beginning to the end.”

A sense of divine purpose. A sense of divine purpose, eternity in our hearts! Go home and think about eternity.

Our Present Situation

Okay, so here we are: eternity past, eternity future, and here we are in time. And what is going on in time? Man has sinned and been separated from God; lost without hope in this world. But we are thankful as God's people that He has divinely intervened.

Born Again

Let us look at Ephesians 2:4-7. “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” Saved, washed in the blood.

Ephesians 2:13. “But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

In Matthew 27:50-52, “And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth shook; and the rocks were split, and the tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.”

What happened at the cross? That way has been made; the way back to the presence of God; the way that was lost at the fall, where we were without hope and not able to communicate with God. We dare not stand afar off, Hebrews 10, we have been brought near by the blood of Jesus.

What had been lost was a capacity to communicate with God. We were meant to communicate with God in spirit, and that capacity was lost. Our spirits became inactive, unable to communicate with God, cut off. But we can say again, “but God.” If you think about the Lord Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus, what was His big point when He was talking? Nicodemus came and said, “You are a great teacher. Can I meet you? I want to get schooled on this teaching you are doing.” He was a Pharisee, right? What did the Lord say to Nicodemus' question? “You must be born again.”

The things we are talking about require us to be born again. The things we are talking about can only be done in spirit. Jesus responded and said to Nicodemus in John 3:5-7, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'”

How many people can remember getting born again? Do you remember that day? Do you remember that time? I have one testimony about being born again, "Heaven came down and glory filled my soul." Do you know that song? "Heaven came down and glory filled my soul." It happened.

In Ephesians Paul talked about apprehending things in the Spirit. God's eternal purpose, the purpose for this conference is sharing God's eternal purpose. And it can only be apprehended in our spirits.

And we have been born again, exercise our spirits. Ephesians 1:17-19, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him." "Epignosis," spiritual knowledge of Him. "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe."

All Things Are Spiritual

These things are spiritual, "give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation." I do not give you a mind and a will to exercise yourself and study, and study, and study. It says exercise your spirit. "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened."

What are the eyes of our heart? Eyes of our spirit, spiritual eyes. So, in the midst of declaring all these things so strongly in Ephesians 1, Paul could not help but say, "I pray that the eyes of your heart would be enlightened."

I found this quote by Brother Kaung, which I think gives a good understanding of what happens in our spirits when we are born again. "When we believe in the Lord Jesus, something happens in us. Glory filled our soul when we knew the Spirit was in us. Our spirit is resurrected to new life. And the Holy Spirit of God comes and dwells in our spirit. We are born from above. We are children of God. And because we have this new life in us, life in the Spirit, God dwells in our spirit. God dwells in our spirit. Eternal life dwells in our spirit." So that begins our entry to God's eternal purpose. God's eternal purpose is born in us, in our spirit, when we are born again. "You must be born again."

God Has Made Jesus both Lord and Christ

So now I want to just talk for a few minutes about Acts 2. Remember what went on in Acts 2? It was the day of Pentecost, pouring forth of the Spirit. And Peter stood and preached the most wonderful thing. Every time I read those words after being saved for 50 years, I just marvel and say, "Oh wow, Peter the fisherman that the Lord loved and was patient with and brought him along." The Spirit fell on Peter, and he had such a marvelous sermon. Read Peter's sermon, that is part of my testimony.

But then I want to look at what is the fruit of Peter's message. Acts 2:32-36. ""This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. For it was not David who

ascended into heaven, but he himself says: 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET."' "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified."

That might be the high point of that sermon. You know, we often think of the outpouring of the Spirit as for us. How much teaching is there on speaking in tongues? I do not think speaking in tongues is wrong or bad. It is supposed to be done in order, Paul says, but so often we hear teaching, it is on this. But there was something bigger that happened. I do not know if it could be bigger, but something else happened here.

So let us see what happened at the close of Peter's message, continuing in the second chapter of Acts. After Peter said to the Jews, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified." "Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" "If we are convicted, what shall we do?"

"And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Repent, and then you receive the Holy Spirit.

"For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself. And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls."

The Church

And what is the next verse? Everybody that has their Bibles open, what is the next verse? "And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

The church was born. You know, the result of their being caught by the Lord was the church was born. All these people repented and were baptized; they were cleansed by the blood; they received the gift of the Holy Spirit; they were soundly saved.

And this is a key point in my personal testimony: "they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." There is something done when we are born again that causes us to want to be with the saints, to share Christ together, to be built up with one another. We may not understand what happened, but we can sense in our spirits that God has done something.

And you know, these times, these were not things to be copied. Have you ever heard of some people wanting to get together and set up a New Testament Church? What do you have to do to be a New Testament church? Get some teaching, have some

ministry time; to fellowship - fellowship is sharing Christ, it is not friendship; to the breaking of bread; and to prayer. In fellowship we become best friends; but the goal is fellowship, the fruit is friendship. Drawn together, gathered and assembled in His name.

Our gathering together is a testimony to the world. Somebody said the other day that we were concerned about the gospel, but we are sharing the gospel every Sunday, right here. And if you really care for someone, you can bring them to this weekly gospel meeting when we break bread, it is a real testimony.

We must understand that the church is spiritual, it is not something man plans: this experience of being born again, and in our spirits wanting to be built up with the saints and gathered together, assembled in His name.

And this vision of Christ in His church is not something that we see one day and then we are done. It is not something we graduate from, not something they teach in seminary, not something we can study and study. Obviously, we read the Word, it witnesses to us about these things. But we do not graduate, we never graduate from this thing of God's eternal purpose.

We are learning, moving on in fullness our whole lives. I often hear people say, "Have you seen the church? Have you seen God's eternal purpose?" Like it could be done at a point in time. Hearts might be touched. Paul was touched, Peter was touched, but they spent the rest of their lives gaining Christ and fulfilling God's eternal purpose. So it is, we are always moving on.

Peter's Lifelong Experience of Christ

Peter Was Called

Peter had a lifelong experience of Christ. And where did Peter start? He started as he was called, by the Sea of Galilee, Matthew 4:18-20. As Jesus was "walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed Him."

Peter Received Much Revelation

Peter followed the Lord and gave up his worldly pursuits. And as He went on, they followed Him. So, they were following Him. If you read the Gospel of Matthew, when the Lord was moving around, Peter was with Him, Peter saw the things He was doing. In Matthew 16:13-18, "...Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

We ask ourselves that question, "who do you say that I am?" "And Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal

this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. "And 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 overpower it." The rock here is not Peter. We just got a new pope. They talked all the time about Peter. Who is the new Peter here? The rock was not Peter, it was Christ.

Peter Committed to the Lord Jesus

Upon this rock, upon this revelation of Christ, that is where the church is built. That is why we can have a church, an assembly. And then Peter also committed himself to the Lord in John 6:53-68. Remember the Lord's message about eating His flesh and drinking His blood? And many left. They all went, "Oh, my gosh, what is this? I am out of here." But Jesus asked the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" "Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life." Peter made another commitment to follow the Lord.

So, Peter saw the Lord and was given to Him. And the Lord saw something in Peter that He could use, that He appreciated. And He patiently, patiently worked with Peter, and then He was able to use him mightily. He was most prominent in the early church. If you are reading Acts, he was at the center of things. But after Acts 15, he disappeared.

Peter's Ministry at the End

But the book of I Peter tells you where he was. Within a couple of years of His death, Peter was ministering among the churches in Asia Minor. That seems to be the area where he ended up serving. He was encouraging, exhorting the saints who were under great persecution. He was living out God's eternal purpose toward the end of his life. Peter did not retire, we cannot retire from working with the Lord's saints.

And so, there are many things that Peter said to them in this book. And as part of my testimony, I just want to mention three of them that have really spoken to me over the years.

Remember Jesus Christ

I Peter 1:3-5 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

Peter was still under that same spirit that he had in Acts 2. This is a strong, strong statement. These believers were under persecution. What would you tell somebody that was being persecuted? Be warm and filled? Do not worry about it, it will be okay? No, he says, "Remember Jesus Christ." What a powerful thing to tell them. In all our trials, we need to remember Jesus Christ and what Peter shared in this passage. Two more things he shared there are based on seeing Jesus Christ, the One who has head over all things to His church.

Living Stones Fitted in the House of God

Peter is still sharing Christ, but now he has something more, God's purpose in seeing the church, and that is in I Peter 2:4-5. "And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

He would say the same thing to us, we are living stones. And that is a furtherance of Matthew 16, where the Lord said, "Blessed are you...upon this rock I will build My church." He is building up the holy house, the holy habitation in our midst. And we are all living stones, born again as living stones.

So, I think we can ask ourselves, where do you fit? Do you know? Are you a stone? Where do you fit in the house? And that house, this spiritual house, testifies of Jesus Christ, of God reigning and ruling. There is a specific place He has for each one of us.

The House of God Registers in Heaven and on Earth

The third thing I see in I Peter, he continues in that same spirit, ministering to the local churches. He says in I Peter 2:9-10, "But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY."

How powerful is that? That same anointed spirit that started in Acts 2. But we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that we may be a testimony of Him who has called us out of darkness into light. It registers in heaven, the fact that we are the body of Christ, a royal priesthood. The house of God registers in heaven, and it registers on earth.

Conclusion

So, as we look forward to this conference, we need to stop and think about why we have this conference. Not just is it good to be together; it is good to be with one another for a week and to eat too much and enjoy the heat. It is going to be 103 degrees some days this week. Pray, we must pray for the weather.

We have been called: we are called to be a testimony; we are called to be the body of Christ, the bride of Christ; holy people for God's own possession. And these are the things that we need to be thinking about as we look forward to this conference. We need to be engaged, not because we are stuck here, but because we want to serve the Lord in the context of His eternal purpose.

We talked about what we need to prepare our hearts. God's perspective is eternal, eternity past, eternity future. But man's perspective is limited. We just think of the

cradle to the grave, and that is it. How discouraging. Paul said in I Corinthians 15, if that is our perspective as believers, “we are of all men most to be pitied.”

How pitiful. But God has intervened and saved us, washed us with the blood, and caused us to be born again. We are new creatures in Christ. We have a new perspective in our new life in Christ; we have been born again to be part of His body until He returns.

The mystery is great, but it is Christ in His church. It is the Father's will to sum up all things in Christ and to be preparing the bride for His return. We are called and born into these things in spirit and are meant to live our lives on earth in light of all these things; looking for and hastening the coming day of God; waiting for and hastening the coming day of God.

So let us be encouraged.

We thank You, Lord, for calling this assembling together, this convocation next week. We pray You would give us Your heart and Your burden as we prepare. We pray You would be meeting us in practical things. We pray You would be meeting those that are serving and teaching. But we also pray that each one of us would be caught of Christ and His church. Lord, we pray You would quicken us to be excited and anticipate what we might hear at this upcoming conference. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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