

THE WAY OF RECOVERING THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS CHRIST

TRIBULATION

Revelation 1:9—I John, your brother and fellow-partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and patience, in Jesus, was in the island called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, we want to thank Thee for bringing us here. We do realize that we are in Thy presence because it is Thy precious promise to us: “Where two or three are gathered together unto My name, there am I in the midst of them.” Truly, Lord, we gather unto Thy name, and we are assured that Thy presence is here with us. There is nothing more precious to us, Lord, than Thy very presence. We pray, Lord, as we are in Thy presence, that the light of Thy countenance may shine upon us. Thou art the only One who knows us. We are open to Thee. We pray, Lord, that Thou will search and examine us, that Thou will give us an open heart and unveiled face so that we may behold Thy glory and be transformed from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.

We do want to thank the Lord for bringing us together. I always think that every opportunity of gathering before the Lord is a special grace. We do not know when the Lord will return, but we sense it is very, very near. Therefore, we want to thank Him for giving us this opportunity to prepare for His coming. The prayer of our heart is that when He comes, we shall see Him without shame.

THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS

We have three things before us—the testimony of Jesus, the recovery of that testimony, and the way of recovery. I wonder how many Christians are familiar with the term *the testimony of Jesus*. Maybe they have heard it until they are tired of it. Or maybe they have never heard of such a term. But one thing is sure—from the word of God we find that the testimony of Jesus is the eternal purpose of God. This term and similar words are used especially in the book of Revelation at least eight times. I will leave it with you to find out where they are.

In Revelation 19:10 it says, “The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus.” This book of Revelation is a book of prophecy. And what is the spirit of prophecy? I think we are all curious about prophecy, but do we know the spirit of prophecy? When we read the book of Revelation, are we only interested in the coming events? Do we try to figure out all these prophecies until we become sons of prophets? If we do not see Jesus and only see coming events, we will miss the whole point of Revelation, because the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus.

As a matter of fact, the entire Bible is the testimony of Jesus. The Lord Jesus said, “Ye search the scriptures, for ye think that in them ye have life eternal, and they it is which

bear witness concerning me; and ye will not come to me that ye might have life” (John 5:39-40).

Hence, the testimony of Jesus is revealed throughout the whole Bible. Unless we know what the testimony of Jesus is, we can never really know the word of God.

JOHN’S VISION OF THE RISEN LORD

What is the testimony of Jesus? If the whole Bible is concerned with the testimony of Jesus, it is impossible for us to relate it fully in these short messages. But in my understanding, I think the testimony of Jesus can be summed up in just two verses in Revelation 1:17-18: “And when I saw him I fell at his feet as dead; and he laid his right hand upon me, saying, “Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the living one: and I became dead, and behold, I am living to the ages of ages, and have the keys of death and of hades.”

In Revelation, chapter 1, we read that John received a vision of the risen Lord; and this vision is meant for every one of us. We need to have a fresh vision of our Lord Jesus. We know Him as our Savior, but we need to know Him as God the Father knows Him. And this was the vision given of the Lord Jesus to John.

Who is the Person in that vision? He is the first and the last and the living One. This speaks of His eternity and His deity. He is the first and He is the last. And He is the living One. He is the eternal and He is life itself. This is what the Lord Jesus is in eternity.

But thank God, He said, “I became dead.” How can the living One become dead? The only explanation is the love of God. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (see John 3:16). God the Son became Man. And as the One who knows not sin, He became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God (see II Corinthians 5:21).

How we praise and thank the Lord Jesus for what He has done for us! We would not be here if He had not come into this world. We would not be here if He had not become dead. His death is our salvation, and we cannot help but praise and thank Him all the time.

Then He said, “Behold, I am living to the ages of ages and have the keys of death and Hades.” He speaks of His resurrection and ascension. God has anointed Him Lord and Christ. He is the victorious One.

This is the vision that the apostle John saw on the island of Patmos, and this is what God wants every one of us to see. Do we see our Lord Jesus as the first? He is to be the first in our life. He is the originator of everything in our life.

Do we see Him as the last? Of course, this is not in the sense that He is the last one in our life. It is in the sense that He is the end, the purpose, the aim of everything to us.

Do we see Him as the living One, and that He lives in us? Christ in us is the hope of glory. Do we realize how He went through Calvary’s cross and opened for us a new and living way and now beckons us to walk in it?

Do we see that He is the risen One? He is on the throne, and He beckons us to come up in order that one day we may reign with Him.

To put it in one word: do we see Him as our all and in all? Is there any rival in our hearts to Him being the first and the last? Can we really testify: “Whom do we have in heaven but Thee? Whom do we desire after on earth but Thee?” This is the testimony of

Jesus, and this testimony is entrusted to the church. It is entrusted to every one of us, and we are suppose to bear that testimony.

THE TESTIMONY IN THE EARLY CHURCH

We do praise and thank God that in the history of the early church in Acts, chapters 2 and 4, we see that they had the testimony of Jesus because those who believed persevered and continued in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles in prayers and in the breaking of bread.

The teaching of the apostles is none other than the teaching of Christ. They did not have their own teaching. They only taught what Christ had taught them. The apostles did not have their own fellowship. On the contrary, you will recall that Paul scolded the Corinthian believers when they said: “I am of Paul; I am of Apollos; I am of Cephas; I am of Christ.” Is Christ divided? It is the fellowship of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, and we are all called into it.

In the early church, they were one. They assembled together; they praised the Lord together; they broke bread together; and they rejoiced in the Lord together. And because of this, great power came out from them, and God added to them day after day.

In chapter 4 we discover that they were completely delivered from their self-possessiveness. They loved one another just as Christ loved them. And what a testimony they gave of the Lord Jesus! When the world looked at them, they were amazed and could not understand how it could be that these people lived a totally different life from every nation of the world. Jesus was everything in their lives.

Then in Acts, chapter 11, we find that the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. It was the only way they could identify them. Who were they? They were so different that they could not identify them with any country or any nation. They were Christ-men. Oh how they bore the testimony of Jesus!

Within thirty-some years, the gospel had been preached to the ends of the earth because Rome was the center and the end of the earth at that time. What power was manifested! What glory was given to God! Indeed, the early church kept the testimony of Jesus.

THE CHURCH LOSES THE TESTIMONY

But the enemy of God hates the testimony of Jesus and has tried every means to destroy it. At the end of the first century, Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, tell us of the seven churches in Asia, and one of them is the church in Ephesus. Now we know from reading the Bible that the church in Ephesus was a glorious church. Paul spent three years in Ephesus and showed them the whole counsel of God. They loved the Lord so much that when Paul was in prison, he was able to share with them the eternal purpose of God because of their undying love.

But towards the end of the first century, another thirty-some years had passed. As the Lord Jesus walked in the midst of the church in Ephesus, what did He find there? He found that everything went on as usual. They had the knowledge, the teaching, the work, the labor, but the inner fire was gone. He said, “You have left your first love. Unless you repent, your lampstand will be removed” (see Revelation 2:5). The testimony of Jesus had begun to be lost in the church.

Then we read in church history that from the first century till the beginning of the sixteenth century, the church was welcomed by the world. The world had conquered the church, and it had entered into a dark age. Even the most basic teachings of the gospel were lost. They did not know justification by faith; therefore, they tried to be justified by accumulating merits. All kinds of false teachings and doctrines were rampant. You could not see the dividing line between the church and the world. The church had lost the testimony of Jesus.

Thank God, man may fail, but God never fails. Even during all these decaying centuries, God still had His own people. In every century, there was a minority—some people who wanted to return to the Lord—and because of that, they suffered from the official church.

The recovery of the testimony of Jesus began in earnest from the sixteenth century onwards. In the sixteenth century, there was the reformation. God raised up people like Martin Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and so forth, and they restored justification by faith. Today, justification by faith seems to be known by everyone, but at that time it was so new and so wonderful. And the Bible, which was in chains, was opened to the people. Ordinary people had not been allowed to read the Bible, but now there was an open Bible. From that time, God began to recover truth after truth.

THE WAYS OF RECOVERING THE TESTIMONY

Now I want share on Revelation 1:9: “I, John, your brother and fellow-partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and patience, in Jesus, was in the island called Patmos for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus.”

The apostle John was exiled to the island of Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus. How did John keep the testimony of Jesus? He kept the testimony of Jesus by going through tribulation, kingdom, and endurance in Jesus. So how can we recover the testimony of Jesus? Where are the ways? The ways are in tribulation, kingdom, and endurance.

The apostle John went through tribulation because of the testimony of Jesus. He was exiled to the island of Patmos because of the kingdom—the kingdom that is not of the world. If the kingdom were of the world, he would not have been exiled. But because he was faithful to a kingdom that is not of the world, and because of his endurance and patience towards the Lord he was exiled to that island.

We are able to learn something from John’s tribulation. How can the testimony of Jesus be restored in us, and to such an extent that the world will see it and have to do something about it? We feel there are three ways—or, one way with three angles.

TRIBULATION

FIRST GENERATION CHRISTIANS

In order to restore the testimony of Jesus today, we need to know what tribulation is, what kingdom is, and what endurance is. Now we would like to focus our attention on tribulation.

The seven churches in Revelation 2-3 were in Asia Minor and can prophetically be applied to all of church history. We usually say the church in Ephesus represents the

church in the first century because it began with such glory, and they kept the testimony of Jesus as long as the world recognized they were Christ-men.

But unfortunately, gradually, the church that was noted for love had lost their first love. Why did they lose first love? Why did they lose the testimony of Jesus? Maybe it was because the second and third generation people had come into it. The first generation Christians saw the Lord—they had the vision. Everything was new, fresh, living, and vibrant. And because the vision of the Lord had so captured them, they paid a price. They stood for the testimony of Jesus and suffered for it.

The second generation received all the teaching of the first generation and followed all their ways and forms. But unfortunately, because they had never paid a price, they never had a fresh revelation from the Lord. What they received was tradition. Although they were faithful to the tradition, it had become a formality. There was no real fire within them.

When the third generation came into it, all that was left was tradition. As a result of this kind of situation, of course, you will find the inner spring is lost.

We know that in reality there is no second or third generation Christian. Every Christian is suppose to be of the first generation, to have vision, to have the testimony of Jesus, and pay a price for it. When that is missing, there is nothing left but form and tradition. And when God looks at that situation, what can He do to recover the testimony? He uses tribulation. Therefore, when the church entered into the second and third centuries as typified by the church in Smyrna, God allowed the Roman Empire to persecute it. Ten times there was great persecution that came upon the Christians. But thank God, it was through tribulation and persecution that the church was revived. And this is what we discover in the church in Smyrna.

GOD'S HEART IS BLESSING

We do not like tribulation. Naturally speaking, we like prosperity. Do you think God wants to punish us? Is it not in God's heart to bless us?

When God first created man, He said, "You shall have dominion over the fowls of the air, the living creatures on earth, and even the fishes in the sea" (see Genesis 1:26). God blessed the man whom He had created. So we can see that blessing is the heart of God.

But unfortunately, because Adam and Eve rebelled against God, they fell into the temptation of the evil one. And because of sin they were disqualified or unqualified for blessing. If God should bless a sinful person and give him riches—wealth and fame and everything; is it a blessing or a curse?

We recall how God dealt with the children of Israel and delivered them out of Egypt. He brought them into a land flowing with milk and honey. But what happened to that people? Before Moses died, God instructed him to write a song because He knew that the people might forget teachings, but singing songs is easy to remember. So we find the answer to this question in Deuteronomy 32:15: "Then Jeshurun grew fat, and kicked—thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, and thou art covered with fatness;—he gave up God who made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation."

Jeshurun means *the upright people*. They were upright people because they were delivered by the Lord and the Lord blessed them. But under God's blessing, they grew fat and began to kick. They gave up God who made them and lightly esteemed the Rock of His salvation.

Therefore, sinful people do not deserve God's blessing because the more they are blessed, the more wicked they will become. May I even suggest that God cannot bless them. Unfortunately, among many of God's people today, the prosperity gospel has been welcomed. If you believe in the Lord, you do not need to drive a Chevrolet; you can drive something much better. It is not because God does not want to bless us; it is because of our human situation.

TRIBULATION IS GOD'S BLESSING

The way that God really blesses us is through tribulation. Now I want you to change your whole concept about tribulation because today it has taken on a new meaning. As we look at Matthew 24 we find that the Lord began to speak about tribulations, saying that there would be famines and pestilence and earthquakes in diverse places, wars and rumors of wars, nation rising up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

After the Lord's ascension, all these things began to happen in this world. And as we are close to the end of the world, these things are accumulating and increasing. And these tribulations are what we are seeing today. However, in verse 8 He says, "But all these are the beginning of throes."

These are the beginnings of birth pangs. So we can see that the Lord has given us a new concept of tribulation. Why are there tribulations on this earth? To the unbelievers or to the world, it is judgment; but to Christians, these are the beginning of birth pangs. It is true, there are pains, but these pains are positive—not negative. These sufferings or these pains do not bring us to death. On the contrary, they bring us to birth. God uses tribulations to produce the birth of His heart in His people. He will use these tribulations to bring us into His purpose. Now this is the way of tribulation.

IN THE WORLD YOU WILL HAVE TRIBULATION

Before the Lord went to the cross, during the last supper, He had a discourse with His disciples which we find in John, chapters 14-16. He told them not to be grieved, and He gave promises to them. Then He ended His discourse in John 16:33: "These things have I spoken to you that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye have tribulation; but be of good courage: I have overcome the world."

The Lord Jesus said, "In the world, you have tribulation." Now why is this so? We do not belong to the world; but if we did the world would not persecute us. However, because we do not belong to the world, therefore we have tribulation. May I put it this way: if you do not have tribulation in the world, are you really of Christ?

Let us take a look at our Lord Jesus. He came into this world, but He was not of the world. He was heavenly, spiritual, and He carried heaven with Him. He was in the world, but He was not conformed to the world. And because of this, He was rejected, persecuted, and crucified. Do you think that we, who are His, will have better treatment? If the world treats you well, it shows that you have lost the testimony of Jesus.

Assuredly, we do not court tribulation, but tribulation is a must in our lives. What is tribulation? Tribulation is whatever troubles us. It may be something that troubles us physically, mentally or soulfully, or spiritually. If we follow the Lord, we will find that the world is against us and is trying to lead us away from Christ. Not only the world outside is against us, but we have a world within that is against us and is an ally to the enemy. It is the fallen life, the Adamic life, our flesh, our self.

DENY SELF AND TAKE UP THE CROSS

How do we sin? When temptation comes, it tempts the flesh within us to act and it comes forth as sin. That is the reason why our Lord said, “Deny yourself, take up the cross, and follow Me. If you love your soul life, you will lose it. If you lose your soul life for My sake, and for the gospel’s sake, you will win it to eternity” (see Luke 9:23-24).

If we follow the Lord, if we are faithful to the Lord, if we want to keep the testimony of Jesus, anything that is an enemy to the testimony is our enemy. Therefore, when we are following the Lord, not only the outside world will be against us, but even the flesh will rebel within us. Unless our flesh suffers, unless the cross works in our flesh, we will not be able to keep the testimony of Jesus. Every time temptation comes, it is a battle of faith as to whether we will be faithful to the Lord and take up the cross and follow Him or whether we will gratify ourselves. And that will be tribulation and suffering. Our soul will suffer in learning obedience.

NOT MY WILL

When the Lord Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane, not only His physical body suffered but His soul suffered. He said, “I am sorrowful even unto death” (see Matthew 26:38). He was oppressed in His spirit and yet He said, “Lord, not My will, but Thy will be done” (v. 39). This is the way to recover the testimony of Jesus.

Are we willing to pay the price? Are we willing to follow the Lamb wheresoever He goes? Will you take tribulation as a discipline and chastening from your loving Father? No discipline is pleasant at the moment, but it will produce righteousness unto holiness. The Lord said, “You will have tribulation; do not be surprised by it. Do not faint under it. Do not try to escape from it.” As you follow the Lord, if it is His will that you have to go through all these tribulations, take it as a chastening of the Father. He wants to make us sons—not just children.

As I see it there is no better way of restoring the testimony of Jesus than tribulation. You do not need to try to court it because the Holy Spirit will arrange it. He knows how much we can endure. He has measured everything in our lives. Can you trust Him? As we have considered this matter of tribulation, we find that it is not so bad after all.

CHINA REVIVAL

In 1900 there was the Boxer uprising in China. Many missionaries as well as many Chinese Christians gave their lives. It was a great tribulation. But we read in the history of Christianity in China that after the Boxer uprising there was a great revival. God raised up many in China, and used them greatly.

I thank God for Ding Li Mae whom you may never have heard of before. I think of Jia Ye Ming, and then in the 1920s, God raised up John Song and Wang Mingdao (Wang Mingdao’s father died during the Boxer uprising by committing suicide), Watchman Nee, Leland Wang, and many others. Before their time, people hardly knew whether they were saved or not. They said, “You believe; then after you die you go to heaven; and it will be decided whether you can enter in or not.” But during that period, there was such a revival everywhere, and many were saved. The gospel was prospering during that time and the government was favorable to it. So outwardly, it was very prosperous; but unfortunately,

Christianity became something that was welcomed, and all kinds of sects and divisions came in. I cannot go into details, but I went through all these things.

However, God did raise up a marvelous work in China. It was a work without organization—not only among the brothers and sisters but even among those who worked together. It was all from within—just like our body. It is not outwardly organized but it is organized from within. And there is no better organization than that which comes from within because outside organization is human, but when it comes from within it is from the Lord.

The work became so great that it spread all over China; but I am sorry to say that, gradually, organization came in. Not only did the church organize, but the workers organized. Then the whole political situation changed, and under the new regime Christians were persecuted—many were imprisoned and died. Outwardly, there was no more Christianity. But thank God, those who were in labor camps, those who were imprisoned, those who were Christians—no matter whether they were Catholic or Protestant, or what denomination they belonged to—all these things were gone. They loved one another and helped one another. God used persecution to purify His church. The gospel spread and many, many came to the Lord. But sad to say, when China was opened, things returned to the way they used to be. It is the sorrow of my heart. Why cannot we love one another, be one in Christ Jesus and not be divided?

Tribulation purifies us; prosperity destroys us. Many young people in China were enticed by wealth, by riches or by the world. It is a deep problem in China. God knows better. We have to bow before Him and say, “Lord, Thy will be done.” But thank God, throughout the generations and centuries, God has His people. They are those who are willing to pay a price and are faithful to the testimony of Jesus. One day, the testimony of Jesus will overturn the god of this world and then the end will come. We are living in this exciting moment. It can be either way. We can keep the testimony of Jesus or we can lose it.

May God have mercy upon us all.

Dear Lord, we look for Your mercy. In spite of ourselves, do not let us go. Take us in Thy hands. Mold and fashion us according to Thy will. If it pleases Thee make us those who complete the rank of the overcomers. May Thy testimony overcome the world and the god of this world, and may Thy kingdom come. In Thy precious name we pray, Amen.