

THE WAY OF RECOVERING THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS CHRIST

ENDURANCE

II Timothy 4:7-8—I have combated the good combat, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth the crown of righteousness is laid up for me, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will render to me in that day; but not only to me, but also to all who love His appearing.

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 do want to thank Thee for bringing us to this last session. We recognize Thee as the beginning and the end. We thank Thee for beginning this conference, and now we trust that Thou wilt be the end of this conference. Lord, if Thou hast anything that Thou wants to say to us, any unfinished word, we look to Thee that Thou wilt speak . Thou knowest our heart. Thou knowest we do long to know Thee. We do long to be those who have the testimony of Jesus. We thank Thee for putting this desire in our hearts. Now, Lord, lead us into it, that we may truly be those who have the testimony of Jesus, to the praise of Thy glory. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.

In view of the Lord's soon return, we believe that it is His will and desire to raise up a people who have the testimony of Jesus. And through the testimony of Jesus in His people the way of His return will be opened.

We have been considering together the ways of recovering the testimony of Jesus, because this is the eternal will of God. God wants His Son to be known as He knows Him. His salvation is so full. It is not His will just to deliver us out of hell and bring us into heaven. His calling is according to His glory and virtue. He wants those who believe in Him to know His Son in such a way that in their lives they will manifest Him and will be able to bring Him into this world.

PARTAKERS IN THE TRIBULATION, KINGDOM, AND PATIENCE

John was exiled to Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. The reason he had the word of God and the testimony of Jesus was because he was a partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and patience in Christ. In other words, if we have the testimony of Jesus, we have to be partakers in the tribulation and kingdom and patience in Christ. Or, to put it negatively, if we are not partakers of the tribulation and kingdom and patience in Jesus, then we do not have the testimony of Jesus because the testimony of Jesus is a reality. It is not a teaching or a doctrine; it is something that is real and living. Therefore, in order to have the testimony of Jesus, we must be partakers of the tribulation and kingdom and patience in Jesus.

Now the question that we should ask ourselves is this: Are we partakers of the tribulation in Jesus? Are we partakers of the kingdom in Jesus? Are we partakers of the patience in Jesus?

When we think of tribulation, it is something which is very negative; but when we think of kingdom, it is something that is most positive. And when we think of patience, it is something that we want to have. But strangely, we find in the word of God only one article before these three items. It does not say *the* tribulation, *the* kingdom, and *the* patience. It only says, “The tribulation, kingdom, and patience.” In other words, these three things are actually one. We cannot have tribulation without the kingdom or patience without tribulation and kingdom. These three things go together, and this is the way to the recovery of the testimony of Jesus.

IN JESUS

But there is another thing we notice in this Scripture. The apostle John said, “Tribulation and kingdom and patience *in* Jesus.” If we know just tribulation, we will look at it as something very negative, and we will want to avoid it because it troubles us. But if we can look at tribulation *in* Jesus, then there is a completely different concept.

We have seen that tribulation in Jesus is to restore the testimony of Jesus. Therefore, if we go through tribulation *in* Jesus, then the testimony of Jesus will be constituted into our life. Whether the tribulation comes from the enemy as temptation, or whether it comes from the Lord Himself as His testing, if we take it as in the Lord, we will discover more of Christ in us.

The same thing is true with kingdom. If we just hear the teaching of the kingdom, we may think that it is way beyond us. But if we can see kingdom *in* Jesus—that is to say, we come into the kingdom not because we can but because Christ is in us, then we come into the testimony of Jesus.

PATIENCE IN JESUS

Now we would like to look at this matter of patience in Jesus. When you read different translations, sometimes they use the word *patience*, and other versions use *endurance*. But actually, it is the same word and can be used interchangeably.

If we distinguish between these two English words—patience and endurance—we would say that patience applies to persons—we are patient with certain people. And endurance refers to things—surroundings, circumstances, events that happen, and we are able to endure it. This word simply means “to abide under” or “to carry through victoriously.” When a pressure comes upon us, maybe ten pounds, and we are able to bear over ten pounds, then we have endurance. When people test us to a certain point, and we are able to endure it victoriously, then we have patience. So we can see that this matter of patience or endurance is character.

We realize that some people are born with more patience than others and some with less. Some people seem to be able to endure a lot while others seem to be able to bear very little. However, no matter what you are born with naturally, when you come to spiritual things, it is a different story. In other words, our natural patience or endurance is very limited. It cannot endure spiritual pressure whether it comes from man or whether it comes from things.

The problem is that we often think we ourselves have patience, not knowing that with spiritual life, the enemy of God knows how limited we are. And not only does the enemy know how limited we are, the Lord also knows this. As a result, we are often tempted beyond our endurance. Oftentimes, God allows us to have a relationship with a person that is beyond our natural patience in order that we may really learn what patience or endurance is. Hence, the patience or endurance here does not refer to us naturally. It refers to the character of God. God suffers long, and God is patient.

JESUS OVERCAME ALL TEMPTATIONS

When the Lord was on earth, his natural brothers did not understand Him. Not only did his brothers not understand Him, even His disciples did not understand Him. But we see how patient our Lord Jesus was with His brothers in the flesh and with His disciples. He did not give them up quickly. He endured their misunderstanding, and He continued to work among them.

The Jews at that time did not understand Him, and they rejected Him because He did not fit with their concept of the Messiah. But these things did not change our Lord Jesus. He remains the same yesterday, today, and forever. We also find that when the Lord was tempted by Satan, He had endurance and patience to overcome all his temptations.

While Jesus was doing the will of God on earth, so far as His human nature was concerned, He had a body and soul just like we do. When He was incarnated, He became a real Man. He had His thoughts, His will, and His feelings. But the Lord Jesus never lived according to these human feelings. Instead, He lived on earth for the will of God. How He suffered for the will of God—not only from the hands of man but before His Father. He laid down Himself in order to obey His Father, and on the cross He cried out: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” (see Matthew 26:47). Nevertheless, in spite of all these things, the Lord Jesus endured and was patient. This is the same thing He wants to do in us.

TRIBULATION IN THE WORLD

Tribulation comes to those who are the Lord’s. The Lord Jesus said, “In the world you have tribulation, but be of good cheer; because I have overcome the world” (see John 16:33). We do not belong to this world but we are still in the world; therefore, we are surrounded by the world that is not getting better but is getting worse and worse. Temptations and persecutions have become greater and greater. Lawlessness prevails over the world, and for us who live in this world these things will come upon us. How are we going to overcome them? It is a matter of endurance.

TRIBULATION BUILDS CHARACTER

Thank God, He uses tribulation to build character in us. He wants His character to be incorporated into our lives. Now how can this character of endurance or patience become our character? It comes through tribulation. He will allow the enemy of God to tempt us. James tells us that God never tempts people (see James 1:13). So temptation comes from the enemy to try and touch the flesh in us. Our flesh is his ally; and when our flesh is tempted and gives in to the temptation, then sin becomes a reality.

Do you think you have the strength to overcome all the temptations? When the world tempts you with the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, do you think you are able to overcome these temptations? The enemy knows us better than we do. He knows our limit, so he will try to go beyond our limit to ensnare us.

But why does God allow us to be tempted? Why is it that the Lord allows these tribulations to come upon us? It is because God wants to create within us this character of endurance or patience. So if we try to resist temptation by ourselves, sooner or later, we will fall into temptation because we cannot trust ourselves.

OVERCOMING TEMPTATION

How can we overcome temptation? The only way is by the Christ in us, who has overcome the world and has already proven to the world that He has overcome it. Christ in us is our life, and if we depend upon His life to meet temptations, then we will have the victory. But if we try to depend on ourselves, no matter how strong we are, we will fail.

We recall the time when our Lord Jesus said to His disciples: “Do you want to leave Me?” And Simon Peter said, “Lord, You have the words of life. We believe You. Where can we go?” Peter seemed to have such faith in the Lord Jesus. But when He began to reveal to His disciples that He was going to Jerusalem where He would be killed and on the third day He would be raised, He said, “You will all flee from Me.” And Simon Peter said, “No! Others may, but I will not. I will die with You” (see Mark 14:27-29).

In other words, we see that Peter had a great self-confidence in his own strength. And so far as he was concerned, he was sincere; but he did not know himself. Then our Lord said, “Before the cock crows two times, you will deny Me three times.” He said, “I will never do that; others may, but I will not” (see Mark 14:30-31). But sure enough, the Lord allowed the enemy to tempt him. The Lord said, “Satan has demanded to have you, to sift you as wheat.” But without the permission of God, Satan could not do that. Why did the Lord allow this temptation to come upon Peter? Hear what the Lord said: “Even though Satan wants to sift you, I have prayed for you that your faith would not fail; and when you are restored, strengthen your brethren” (see Luke 22:31-33).

We will soon find out that if we depend on ourselves, we will not be able to overcome temptation. And oftentimes the Lord allows us to be tempted beyond where we are in order to learn the lesson that we cannot depend upon ourselves. We have to look to the Lord and allow His character to be built into us.

Simon Peter really thought He loved the Lord when he said, “Other people may fail, but I will never fail You.” But he did fail, and the Lord allowed him to fail. But thank God, the Lord had already prayed for him, and then He restored Peter.

Then in John 21, we find the Lord asking Peter this question before the other disciples: “Do you love me?” Peter realized that his love was not dependable; therefore, he could only say to the Lord, “Lord, You know I am attached to You.” And the Lord asked him the same thing a second time: “Do you love Me more than these?” And Peter could not respond in that way for he had learned his lesson. So he said, “Lord, you know I am attached to you.” And the Lord asked him the third time: “Peter, are you attached to me?” And Peter was grieved and said: “Lord, You know I am attached to You.” He did not dare boast of himself anymore; but it was at that time that Peter realized that he *really* did love the Lord.

We will find that in our environment, God will allow the enemy to tempt us beyond our ability in order that we may learn a lesson. Actually, the Lord has already put enough of Himself in us to overcome the temptation. But unfortunately, we do not rely upon the Lord in us and continue to rely upon ourselves. But thank God, He will use this to teach us the lessons of patience and endurance. In the same way, we find that God tests us. He never tempts us, but He does test us. Temptation is the enemy trying to draw out the lust of the flesh within us, but testing is to bring out His life in us. He tests us that we may not only know ourselves but we may also know Him.

So tribulation can come from two different sources. It can come from the enemy and it can also come from the Lord. From the enemy, it is temptation, and from the Lord, it is testing. He disciplines us so that we will become sons and daughters.

A KINGDOM LIFE

The same thing is true when we come to this matter of the kingdom. When we hear about the kingdom truth, how can we be violent to ourselves? Everybody loves himself or herself. However, God will take us through testing. When His will is revealed to us, we will begin to struggle before the Lord. Deep within us we know that we have to obey the will of God, but in our soul, in our self, we cannot endure it. We will go through a struggle within, and these struggles will help us to know the patience or the endurance of Christ. So far as the kingdom is concerned, we should not think that we have the strength to do that. But thank God, He lives in us. It is a kingdom life, and by that life, we are able to enter into the kingdom of the heavens.

How can we have patience or endurance? Once a lady missionary asked our brother, Watchman Nee: "I am very impatient; will you please pray for me that God will give me patience?" So our brother prayed for her, but when he prayed, he said, "Lord, give our sister more crosses." And the sister said, "I want you to pray for me that I might have patience! I have enough crosses. Don't pray that the Lord will give me more." The reason our brother prayed that way is because the cross constitutes patience within us. If we have more crosses to bear, they will cross out our flesh and add Christ Jesus, as it were, in us.

So these three things are together. Through tribulation and kingdom, we learn patience. And when patience, as a character, is built up in us, then we will find the testimony of Jesus is a reality in us.

FAITH-LOVE-HOPE

In our Christian life, there are three things that are most important—love, faith, and hope. When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, the church was in the early stage, and they had all three of these elements. They had the work of faith, the labor of love, and the enduring constancy of hope. But when we come to Revelation 2, we find that the church in Ephesus had works, labor and they seemed to have endurance; but it was no longer the work of faith, the labor of love, and the endurance of hope. They had lost the inner spring. All they had were those outward things. They had lots of works, many labors, and they seemed to be able to endure quite a lot of things from outside, but it was not because they had hope in the Lord Jesus. They had lost the first love.

Love Grows Cold

Matthew 24:12-13 says, “Because lawlessness shall prevail, the love of the most shall grow cold; but he that has endured to the end, he shall be saved.”

Here we find the connection between love and endurance. The world is getting worse, and lawlessness prevails. And when lawlessness prevails, even if we want to preserve that love, it is very, very difficult. The love of the many has grown cold. Now, how can we continue to love? We need endurance. If we are able to endure, then we are able to love to the end. Love suffers long; love is patient. Thus, we really need that character of patience, and with that character, we are able to love to the very end.

Our Faith is Challenged

The same thing is true with faith. Our Lord Jesus used a parable about a widow (see Luke 18). She tried to plead with the judge against her adversary, but that judge was an unjust judge. He did not fear God nor was he mindful of man. But this widow had faith, and she continued to plead her cause. Finally, the judge did the thing for her that she had asked for.

Then the Lord Jesus said, “When the Lord shall come, will He find faith upon this earth?” (see Luke 18:8). We know that even our faith will be tempted and challenged. If this is true, how can we maintain our faith to the very end? We need endurance.

Hope against Hope

And the same thing is true with hope. We find in Romans 4 that Abraham hoped against hope—that is endurance. So these three elements of Christian life are connected with endurance or patience.

PATIENCE OF JOB

In James 5:11 we read this: “Behold, we call them blessed who have endured. Ye have heard of the endurance of Job, and seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is full of tender compassion and pitiful.”

Job was tempted by the enemy. Even though he was a perfect and righteous man and he feared God, yet Satan tempted him. The Lord allowed Satan to do that because He knew two things about Job. He knew that there was still something in Job that was open to temptation. So when Satan asked to tempt Job, the Lord allowed it. On the other hand, the Lord knew that He had done enough in Job that when he was tempted, he would come out pure. As we read the book of Job, we see how Satan tempted Job, not only destroying all his property, but even all his children died; and he also attacked his body. But God gave him a limit: “You can touch his body but you cannot put him to death.” And we know from the book of Job, how he struggled through this temptation. Neither he nor his friends understood. They came to comfort him; but instead, they added more suffering to him. And because he did not understand, he said some things he should not have.

But once in a while, the light shone within him. For instance, in Job 13:15, he said, “Even though He slay me, I will still trust in Him.” God was bringing out something that He had already done in his life. In Job 19:25 he said, “I know my redeemer lives. Even though I do not see Him, I know he lives, and one day I will stand before Him.” So God allowed the temptation to come upon him, testing him to the uttermost in order that He

could bless him doubly. That is sonship. And oftentimes we will find the same thing happening to us.

We do need to remember that in the world we will have tribulation. If we love the Lord, if we follow the Lord, if we are faithful to the Lord, we will have tribulation. But be of good cheer because our Lord has already overcome the world. The life that He has given us is a victorious life. The Lord uses all kinds of circumstances to draw us out of ourselves and into Himself.

KEPT FROM THE HOUR OF TRIAL

Then in Revelation 3:10 we read this: “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee out of the hour of trial, which is about to come upon the whole habitable world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”

The word of God is the word of His patience, and the church in Philadelphia kept the word of His patience. They were willing to go through sufferings, trusting in the Lord. And because they have kept the word of His patience, the Lord promised them that He would keep them out of the hour of trial which is about to come upon the whole habitable world. What does it refer to? If we understand it rightly, I believe it is the great tribulation. One day, the great tribulation will come upon this world, but the Lord promised those who have kept the word of His patience, when that hour comes, He will keep them out of that hour. In other words, before the tribulation comes upon this world, the Lord will take them to Himself. That is the rapture that we find in Revelation 12: “The man-child is raptured to the throne, and Satan is cast down to the earth from the clouds.” And when Satan is on earth, it will be the great tribulation; but the air is cleared for the Lord to come from the throne to the air.

THE LORD NEVER GIVES US UP

If we learn the patience of the Lord, there is a precious promise that is found in II Peter 3:15, “The patience or longsuffering of the Lord is our salvation.” We are saved because of the longsuffering of our Lord. How often we fail! How often we trust in ourselves! But the Lord is patient with us and never gives us up. “Those whom He has called, He has justified; and those whom He has justified, He has glorified” (see Romans 8:30). This Scripture assures us that the Lord will never give us up. Once He has called us, He will perfect us. We may fail many, many times, but He will not fail, and His longsuffering is our salvation.

So do not try to depend upon yourself. The apostle Paul said, “I know whom I have believed, and I know that He will preserve all that I have entrusted to Him until that day” (see II Timothy 1:12). Our security is in Christ, so let us not depend upon ourselves.

We have heard about kingdom, and we have heard about the testimony of Jesus. Now, do you think you are able to keep the testimony of Jesus? Do you think that you are able to enter into the kingdom gloriously? If we trust in ourselves, we will fail. But thank God, we need not be discouraged because of the longsuffering of the Lord. He will continue to work in our lives until His full purpose is realized. This is what we find in the word of God.

Let us pray,

Dear Lord, we do confess that we are totally undependable. But Thou art the One who is faithful. Thou art the One who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. We thank Thee for Thy longsuffering, that Thou will never give us up but will accomplish all that Thou has purposed for us. May Thou be glorified in us. We commit one another into Thy loving care, trusting that Thou will save us to the uttermost, to the praise of Thy glory. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.