
Ministry Meeting

Testimony -- 1 Peter 2, Matthew 1, 2 Timothy 2, Revelation 3

February 5, 2017

Opening Reading -- 1 Peter 2:5, 9

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Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house and holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ... But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Worshippers First, Then Testimony

Christendom generally has it the wrong way round: it assumes that as soon as you are saved, the first thing is service. That is not what God is looking for, first of all. God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth. God is looking for worship. He is worthy of it. The Lord Jesus is worthy of it. So we are worshippers first of all -- that is the holy priesthood of verse 5.

But verse 9 gives us the royal priesthood -- and that has to do with testimony. There is a dignity God has given us, that we are to display Christ and reproduce Christ in our lives here in this world. To show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light is to be a testimony for Him in this scene.

Matthew 1: The Book of the Generation of Jesus Christ

When you are called into court to testify about a matter, what you testify is what you are absolutely certain and sure of. You are a definite witness. The Lord Jesus gave the perfect testimony. When asked who He was, He answered: 'I am altogether that which I say unto you.' There was never any divergence in His pathway. He was here as a testimony for God and for His Father.

Matthew 1:1 begins: 'The book of the generation of Jesus Christ' -- not a book, not books, but the book. This is the book above all other books. And it is significant that testimony is supported by the book, the word of God. Apart from that, our testimony may or may not be worth anything. If we are going on what we think, or what we want to think, or what someone else says, our testimony may not be very true. The book is the foundation of the testimony.

The Four Women: Grace as the Universal Character of Testimony

Four women appear in the genealogy of the Lord, and they are worth pausing over: Tamar (verse 3), who was not a righteous person; Rahab (verse 5), who was not even an Israelite; Ruth (verse 5), also not an Israelite; and in verse 6, 'her that had been the wife of Uriah' -- not named as Bathsheba, but identified by her connection with Uriah. That is significant. Neither she nor David at that time were upright.

Why are these four women here in the very genealogy of the Lord? It seems they should not be there. But that is precisely the point: grace. It is only by grace that these four women could be in the generation of the Lord, and it is only by grace that any of us are the Lord's. Grace is the universal character of the testimony. In the Old Testament there were law, priests, prophets, and kings -- and in every one of them man failed. It is only grace, unmerited and entirely undeserved, that accounts for these women, and for us.

Fourteen Generations: Completeness and Finality in Christ

Verse 17 gives us three sets of fourteen generations: from Abraham to David, from David to the captivity, and from the captivity to Christ -- fourteen, fourteen, fourteen. Fourteen is seven doubled. Seven in Scripture speaks of completeness and perfection. These three sets of fourteen generations ending with Christ show us the completeness and finality of testimony in the Lord Jesus Christ. All testimony is in Himself. We fail -- but we are to display that testimony of Jesus Christ.

Joseph: Righteousness in Testimony

Verse 19 introduces Joseph -- not Mary -- and the reason is significant. In public matters, in matters of testimony, the man is first. Even in the epistles, Priscilla might be mentioned before Aquila in matters of hospitality; but in matters of teaching or public ministry it was Aquila. Here it is Joseph, described as 'a just man' -- righteous. That is another essential characteristic of the testimony: righteousness, doing what is right. Nothing is right if it does not honor the Lord Jesus and is not in accordance with His word. So we have the book, and now we have righteousness that is based on His word and has reference to Himself.

2 Timothy 2:22 -- The Order of the Testimony

2 Timothy 2:20-22

But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work. Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

We are here in a day of ruin, and yet we are to bear a testimony and display Christ. The order in verse 22 is the order God gives: righteousness first. If we had been writing this, we might have put love first, or peace. But God puts righteousness first. Doing what is right before God, in accordance with His word, is the very first essential.

Then faith -- for faith connects us with God. We had no connection with God before He implanted faith in our hearts, and that same faith sustains the walk daily. Then love -- we can have all other things and have not love, and we are as sounding brass. Love is the oil that lubricates the machinery. In 1 Corinthians 12 you have the machinery; in chapter 13 you have the oil; in chapter 14 you have the operation of the machinery. A machine without oil will not run long. Then peace -- the effect of righteousness will be peace (Isaiah 32:17). These things are in their proper order.

1 Corinthians 12:12 -- Called by the Name of Christ

1 Corinthians 12:12

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is the Christ.

We are called by that name -- the Christ -- because we are part of His body. When God created Eve from Adam's side and gave her to Adam, He called them Adam: they were one. And so it is that we are called by the name of Christ because we are in union with Him. He is the one who is absolutely perfect and complete in obedience to God and His word, and He is the one who sets the example. Peter, who had walked with Him and seen everything He said and did, writes: 'He has left us an example that we should follow in His steps.' That is very much in line with the testimony we are to bear.

Revelation 3:7-8 -- Philadelphia: The Three Little Things

Revelation 3:7-8

And to the angel of the assembly in Philadelphia write: These things saith the Holy, the True, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth. I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

The seven addresses to the assemblies in Revelation 2 and 3 have to do with the state of the church -- both the actual assemblies of that day and the prophetic character of successive periods of church history. Philadelphia is the best of the seven as to spiritual state. And yet there is nothing magnificent in what is said of it. Three things are stated in verse 8, and none of them is grand: a little power, kept my word, and not denied my name.

Government has two instruments: a sword to put down evil, and a key to open doors. The one who has the key of David has placed Philadelphia in a situation where a door stands open that no man shuts. It is a small door, for small things -- just enough for these three. That is the door that the Lord has opened for the testimony of Philadelphia.

A Little Power: Withdrawing from Iniquity

What is the little power? The foundation of God stands firm (2 Timothy 2:19): 'The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.' Power in an evil day is expressed by separation from evil. It is not a call to overcome iniquity or fight iniquity. It is just this: let everyone who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity. Nothing more. But that is the little power that the door is open for.

Kept My Word: The Deeper Relationship

There is a distinction in John 14 worth marking. Verse 15 says: 'If ye love me, keep my commandments.' And Luke 17:10 says: 'When ye shall have done all the things that have been ordered you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done what it was our duty to do.' That is the commandments. But verse 23 of John 14 adds: 'If anyone love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him.' The Lord's word -- this book -- is not the same as His commandments, and keeping it carries a promise: the Father loves him, and both Father and Son come and make their abode with him. To keep His word means to have it in my heart. That is the key. He does not say they kept all the commandments perfectly. He says they kept His word.

Not Denied My Name: A Negative Testimony

When Elijah was utterly discouraged and said he was the only one left in Israel, the Lord told him He had reserved seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal. That is a negative testimony -- they did not do the evil thing. And that is all the Lord can say of Philadelphia: thou hast not denied my name. He does not say they magnified His name on the earth, or brought great honor to it. He says: you did not deny it. Not like Peter, who said: 'Him? I don't know him. What are you talking about?'

These are three small, weak things -- and they are the best the Spirit can say about the testimony of the church when we read these letters. They are also the very least of what should exercise us in our conduct here. A little power: let him that names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity. Kept my word: that is how we express our love for the Lord. Not denied my name: the least we can do is not hide our Christianity under a bushel. May the Lord give us grace that these things would be true of us.

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Lord willing.