

The Nature of the testimony Life – Incorruptible and Indestructible

Reading: Heb. 11:1-19.

We are going to meditate upon the innermost nature of that testimony which relates to the Lord in the earth, and in this universe. This whole chapter is occupied with that testimony, but we are going to take but a part of it, seeing the testimony as touched upon by the first four of the people mentioned.

Let us remind ourselves that *the* heart of the testimony of the Lord is life; a life which is incorruptible and indestructible. We know, of course, that that life is bound up with a Person, "*this life is in His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord*". When we speak of the testimony of Jesus we always keep in view the Person first, but then there comes that for which the Person stands, that which is the pre-eminent element in the Person and in the work of that Person. When you ask the question as to what it is that the Lord Jesus stands for in His very Person, and what it was that He came, lived, and went to the cross for, the answer is found in one word, LIFE. He came that life and immortality might be brought to light, and He Himself *is* that life.

So that the testimony of the Person, Jesus, is the testimony of life incorruptible and indestructible, and that is the issue of the ages. That is the thing upon which everything has been hanging from the beginning. It was on that matter that the battle took place in the first instance in the Garden. It was the issue of life or death, and it has been that issue all along. Inasmuch as we are related to the testimony of Jesus we are bound up with that issue as the primary thing in our beings, and therefore also in our work, which we may call our ministry. If the Church has been brought into being as above all other things, the Body of Christ, then it is in that Body that this testimony has to be deposited and manifested, and when we speak of the Body as a whole we speak of all the members individually.

That is familiar ground, but it is the centre, the heart, of everything for us. It really defines what it is we are called into, what, in the first place, is the very nature of the believer's relationship to Christ, the basis of that union; and then, in the second place, it defines the very object of the believer being here on the earth.

When we turn to the this chapter we find that this central reality of incorruptible and indestructible life is illustrated, set forth, in principle in various ways, from various standpoints. The first four people mentioned in this succession of the testimony bring before us a very real presentation of the basis, nature and outworking of this life.

Abel – The Basis of the testimony

We begin with Abel, in verse 4:

"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he had witness borne to him that he was righteous, God bearing witness in respect of his gifts: and through it he being dead yet speaks."

With Abel there is introduced the basis of the testimony. The testimony begins with Abel, and we know that wherever we find the beginning of a thing we always find all the subsequent development in germ form, and everything subsequent will, therefore, work back to that and be included in that. That is very clearly seen when you recognise that the basis, the introduction of the testimony of life is incorruptible and indestructible by the shedding of blood. With Abel the shedding of blood is introduced in a definite way as the law and basis of the testimony of Jesus. That leads right on to Christ, and includes

every drop of blood shed, from the day that Abel offered his sacrifice to the day when Christ offered Himself in the shedding of His blood.

There are two ways of taking up the testimony, becoming bound up with it from the beginning. There is the life of becoming terribly responsible for it, so that that testimony represents death and judgement and destruction from the presence of the Lord, the testimony testifying against. But there is the other way, by a living relationship to the Lord Jesus coming into the whole testimony from Abel onward, and all its value. Inclusively the testimony comes in with Abel, *on the ground of the shed blood*. Because of that shed blood he was instantly involved in the battle of the ages, the spiritual conflict of all time. From the unseen there immediately emerged one who was *the* antagonist of that life, him that had the power of death, and through Cain he slew what was mortal of Abel. But after millenniums the Word of God says he yet speaks, he is not dead. His testimony was in relation to a life indestructible, and he still lives, "*he being dead yet speaketh*".

Abel was the first link in the chain of the overcomers, and you can relate the end with the beginning and declare from Revelation 12 that he overcame because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of his testimony, and he loved not his life even unto death. That was true of Abel, the first witness, the first link in the testimony. It is the mighty power of the blood of the Lord Jesus which in type is introduced with Abel, which is the inclusive ground of the testimony of a life which is beyond the power of Satan and hell and men to touch and to destroy.

The Word of God makes it perfectly clear that everything in the life of a believer is related to that precious blood.

Salvation is by the blood. Just as Israel came out of Egypt to be God's people through shed and sprinkled blood, so alone are men and women saved from sin, from hell, from judgement, from death, from the power of Satan, by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus. The sinner, then, finds salvation in blood and only in the blood.

The saved find their *life in the blood*, for they have, in that spiritual sense, still to continue to drink the blood for their very life. The Lord Jesus said: "*Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves*", and we know that the tense is: Except you *keep on* eating and drinking you have no life. He, in the value of His own Being, made over to us by the Holy Spirit becoming operative in us by Divine energies, becomes our very life as believers, to maintain us. So that the eating and the drinking continually are basic to the life of the saved.

Sanctification is related to the blood. This very letter to the Hebrews tells us that in the second chapter, verse 11:

"For both He that sanctifies and they that are sanctified are all of one ..."

Link that with chapter 13, verse 12:

"Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered without the gate."

"... they that are sanctified ... that He might sanctify the people through his own blood ..."
So that our sanctification rests upon the blood of the Lord Jesus.

All our *prayer has to be based upon that blood* for its effectiveness. There is no effectual intercession apart from the value of that blood. Again this letter tells us that in chapter 10, verse 19:

"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus."

You see this is coming into the place of intercession, of prayer ministry, and that is made effectual by the blood, There is no prayer which avails apart from the blood of Jesus. That blood is the effective element. It is the living factor in our salvation, our sanctification, our intercession. It makes prayer living. If you want to get over death elements in prayer, that with which probably you are not a little familiar; if you want to know the deliverance from those forces which descend upon you in the time of prayer to quench you, your appeal must be to the blood and you will find that it is effective. It is the power of life which conquers death. Praying through is praying in virtue of the blood of Jesus.

Not only is salvation, and maintenance, and sanctification, and intercession based upon the blood, but *our victory continuously and finally is on the ground of the blood*. Again this letter tells us that in the second chapter, verses 14-15:

"Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, He also himself in like manner partook of the same; that through death he might bring to naught him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

By blood, you see, He destroyed him that had the power of death, and delivered those who were in bondage because of the fear of death. Surely we can link with that again Revelation 12: *"They overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb ..."*. Victory, then, is bound up with the blood.

Everything that comes out in a fuller revelation of the life in relation to God is based upon the blood, and all that is found in germ, in principle, in the blood which Abel shed in offering his sacrifice to God. The first step in the testimony is very comprehensive.

Enoch – The Outworking of the testimony

Heb. 11:5-6:

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God translated him: for before his translation he hath had witness borne to him that he had been well-pleasing unto God: and without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek after Him."

Here we have something which is tremendously striking and impressive, that with one bound you leap from the beginning to the end of the testimony. It is as though for the moment the Lord has set aside, kept in reserve, all that lies between, and shows us what the end of the testimony will be as related to the beginning. He brings the two immediately together. Here is the blood in the first instance as the basis of the testimony, as containing the testimony in itself; life which conquers death, a life incorruptible and indestructible. Then He looks right on and sees the end of that as typified in Enoch; that overcomer company lifted clean out of the realm of death, where death is raging, and translated that it should not see death.

We are too familiar with the Old Testament chapter in which the translation of Enoch is mentioned for us to go back over it again, but let us just call to mind the fact that in a chapter of monotonous reiteration of the death and burial of a whole succession of men, there is, right there, that one break, although the course had been in case after case, *"and he died"*, there suddenly comes a rift, *"... and he was not; for God took him"*, and then the old story goes on again. It is life breaking into the course of death, conquering it, and not going that way at all. The end will be that. We sing sometimes, and our hearts always throb and thrill when we sing:

"Oh joy! Oh delight! Should we go without dying;"

That is not a vain expectation. That is secured in the blood of the Lord Jesus for a company which will realise God's full thought. May we be of that company! In any case, whether we go through the grave, or without going through the grave, we are called into this testimony that death has no power over us. May the Lord find us in the way of faith in that matter, because Enoch attained unto it by faith, and we need faith unto victory over death. The enemy is always seeking to bring down our faith in that direction, and to get us to accept death, not merely physical death, but all kinds of death, and all forms of death's expression, to accept it. Faith says the blood of Jesus Christ has secured victory over death in all its forms. May we be of the succession of those who overcame by faith in the blood.

That is all we intend to say about Enoch at the moment, but it is a very impressive thing that the Lord should bring the beginning and the end, the end and the beginning, together here, and show that, because of that blood of the testimony, the ultimate issue is *this — Rapture!*

We return to that which lies between. The two things which follow, which are really between Abel and Enoch spiritually speaking, are related respectively to those things. Noah is related spiritually to Abel, and Abraham is related spiritually to Enoch. Let us see how that is.

Noah – The testimony in Its Ministry to the World

"By faith Noah, being warned of God concerning things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; through which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" (Heb. 11:7).

Noah is the testimony in the world, the ministry of the Church. God looked and saw that iniquity was almost universal, that wickedness filled the earth, that every imagination of man's heart was evil. Where there is no righteousness there must be condemnation, judgement and death. But Noah lived in the midst of a state like that, a state of sin, and death, and he lived against that state of things, he did not live with it. He stood as a rock in the midst of that evil current, that tide of iniquity, and was not carried away by it. It was borne in upon him as from the Lord as to what the inevitable issue would be. The Lord made it very clear to Noah how that thing would and must end. Moved with fear he built an ark to the saving of himself and his family.

Noah's faith, in the first place, said, Yes, death may become universal in this world, *but* I shall not be involved in it! I believe for something other than that for myself and mine! That was the nature of his faith. His faith lifted him out of what was universal death, and he struck by his faith a line for life as overcoming that death so far as he was concerned. He stood so that he should be in contrast with what was wellnigh universal, and, standing on that ground, what happened? His very stand in life against death was a ministry, "*he condemned the world.*" The presence of a living one in a dead realm is always a conviction and a condemnation. You have not to say anything, although the Lord says that Noah was a preacher of righteousness. You have not to say anything if you are living in the life of the Lord Jesus, and moving in a realm of spiritual death. What happened in the case of Noah happens in your case spontaneously. You condemn the world, and the world knows its condemnation by your very presence.

That is the vocation of the Church here. We know that the fuller light upon the position of believers in this world which comes to us in the New Testament makes that very clear. John 17 is just that. John's letters are just that. "*I write unto you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one ...*". What leads up to that? It is what John has to say about life which we have in God's Son, Jesus Christ, overcoming the world, overcoming the wicked one. It is the power of the blood, the power of that life. It is the testimony of

life against death here in this world which is the vocation of the Church, the vocation of every believer.

Noah, then, represents the ministry of believers, and the ministry of the Church, in maintaining a mighty testimony against the death state, the evil state. It is not only indestructible life which is the testimony of life against death, it is incorruptible life which is the testimony of holiness against iniquity, against evil. That is why the Lord has left us here. That is the very calling and vocation of the Lord's people, of the Church. It does not say that the whole Church is living on that level, but at any rate there is a little handful who recognise why they are here. The testimony is essentially a testimony of a life which witnesses against death wherever death is, and a life which witnesses against evil wherever evil is, which, as in the case of Him who was the Life, drags evil out of its power and exposes it, and makes it incapable of hiding itself. It brings out the forces of death and then overcomes them. We are not surprised that when the Lord gets a living instrument, a vessel in which there is the testimony of such a life, that there comes about an *intense* sense of sin, more so than in any other realm. We are not surprised that there comes about an *intense* consciousness of what death is, and of conflict with death. *The* ultimate issue of the ages always arises anew when the Lord gets a vessel in which there is a measure (if not in fulness) of this life, this testimony. We are called to that. That is why we are here.

Noah, we said, was related to Abel. You see, the blood introduces the testimony, is the foundation. Now the Church stands upon that, and bears its witness against the condition as it is all around. The effect of that testimony is condemnation, and hatred of the witness.

Abraham – The testimony to Sonship and Inheritance

We pass to Abraham, and see the testimony from another standpoint, in relation to Enoch. Enoch speaks of the rapture, the translation, the company going through without being touched by death. What company? Who comprise that company? Notice two things which are pre-eminent in relation to Abraham; a spiritual sonship, and a spiritual inheritance. Look again in Hebrews 11, and underline "inheritance", and that which has to do with inheritance. Then go back and see how, and by whom, that inheritance is to be secured. It is to be secured in Isaac. There comes in that little parenthetical word about Sarah, which, in effect, says that the realisation of this end, the attainment unto this inheritance, is impossible along natural lines, something which cannot be realised by natural means. That is the meaning of that word about Sarah. The inheritance can never be secured by any kind of natural means or resources. The inheritance will be reached only on the ground that it is all of God, in the power of resurrection.

Who will know that power in its full and ultimate expression? The sons — not the children, but the sons. We know the distinction which the New Testament makes between children of God and sons of God. The children are the born ones, the sons are the grown-up ones, those who have come to maturity are sons. All who are children of God do not attain to sonship. There is coming a day of the apocalypse of the sons. That is the Greek word in Romans 8; the manifestation of the sons of God, the unveiling of the sons. Just as the Son Himself will be unveiled, there will be the unveiling of the sons, the apocalypse of the sons. You notice that in Romans 8 that word is connected with the final issue of Christ's work by His cross and resurrection, when death is fully swallowed up and the reign of vanity is past. Then the sons of God are manifested.

Enoch looks on to a rapture. Revelation 12 shows that that rapture is of a company called the man child, the overcomers. Not all that are in that company, for there is another that is not in that rapture. These are the overcomers, and these are they who know in fulness the power of His resurrection.

Who are they? Not only children of God, but those who have gone right with the Lord into all His purpose, and have come to know in this life the power of His resurrection. In other words, the power of His life has conquered death.

Abraham, then, brings in the sonship, the fulness of sonship on resurrection ground, in the power of resurrection, reaching the inheritance. "*In Isaac shall thy seed be called*"; "*he had respect unto the inheritance*". The inheritance is reached through sonship. In other words, God's full intention for us can only be reached as we go on living on the basis of, and overcoming by, the power of this life.

There are multitudes of the Lord's own people in this world who are children of God, who are rather overcome of the spiritual death around them than overcoming it. They are simply swamped by that, paralysed by it. They find it impossible to open their mouths in the midst of it. They are cowed by it, defeated by it. Their prevailing condition in this world, perhaps in the place of their business, or wherever they may live their life, has silenced them, kept them bound, paralysed, and they are simply going on like prisoners in this world. There are others who, although the conditions are just as desperate, are on top of it, with a glowing testimony to Christ, their Life. They are above the conditions. They are knowing Him in the midst of death as their life, fulfilling their ministry, and through them the world is being condemned around them and feels its condemnation by their very presence. This is the testimony. It is life!

Not Doctrine as Basis, but Life

Are you not impressed with this fact, that, so far as the enrichment of the Church is concerned through the lives of these men, it was never by anything which they wrote. True, Enoch is supposed to have written some visions. Jude refers them: "... *Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, Behold, the Lord came with his holy myriads*" (R.V.M.), but we have not got the prophesies or the visions of Enoch, and the Church has never lived upon them. I do not know that the Church has ever been benefited by them at all. They are not in the canon of the Scriptures. Not one of these men has left any written record by which we have been benefited. But have we been benefited by them? Oh, yes, we owe a lot to them. We owe a lot to Abel; we owe a lot to Noah; we owe a lot to Enoch; we owe a lot to Abraham. What do we owe to them? Life! They have been for us the maintainers of the testimony of life in victory over death. We have come into their succession. We stand upon their ground. We are one with them. We owe a great deal to these witnesses, these overcomers.

The point is this, that the testimony is not doctrine, but life! It is not teaching, it is life! It is not a system of truth, it is life! They have written nothing by which we have been profited. We do not come into the testimony because we come into the teaching of Abel, or the teaching of Noah, or the teaching of Enoch, or the teaching of Abraham. We are in it on the basis of life only. That does not mean that teaching, doctrine, truth can be swept aside as meaning nothing, but it does mean this, that doctrine is only the interpretation of the life. Doctrine does not lead to the life. Doctrine interprets the life. The value of the teaching is the explanation of the truth. Let no one think that the testimony of Jesus is a certain form of teaching, a certain kind of phraseology, is certain things said. All that may be perfectly true as to the testimony, as to the nature of the testimony, the explanation of it, but you can never carry the testimony out into this world by taking out a form of doctrine, by taking out a system of truth. We can never take the testimony out by what we say. *The battle of the testimony is usually fought in the spiritual realm, and that is why so often, before we begin to say anything, there has to be a mighty battle, and something has to be settled in the unseen in relation to the testimony before the words are spoken. It is a position which has to be secured in advance. Life has to once again register itself triumphantly against the forces of death. The word can then come through in the power of that life, in the power of that victory. It is that very conflict which gives to the word subsequently spoken its power, its life, its*

effectiveness. If those of us who have anything to do with ministry simply climbed on to platforms and never had a background conflict in relation to those things the message would be mechanical, there would be nothing in it; but because there is continuously that background fight, that gives the very meaning, virtue and power to that which is said. The word comes out then in virtue of a fresh registration of life over death.

Much of this is said for those who are familiar with the phrase "the testimony". It is said, for one reason, to clarify the nature of the testimony, and for another purpose to call us again to see that it is not a mental apprehension of things said which brings us into the testimony, but it is a spiritual position. The thing that we are to seek from the Lord is not that we might understand all the teaching, but that we might be brought into the power of His resurrection. That we may know that life, and know how to live by that life in the mighty virtue of His precious blood, in all that the Lord Jesus has accomplished by His cross. We are living on the opposite side of Calvary from that of Abel and these other witnesses. Their testimony led on to Calvary, ours comes out of Calvary. We stand in the positive realisation of that towards which their faith looked.

We are surely called, equally with them, to be men and women of faith. It is putting it mildly to say equally. All this means our positive attitude of faith. It is faith basically in all that that blood represents, includes, signifies and secures, and faith for all that that blood works out to. If you believe that the Lord Jesus really has conquered death, and has given to you the very life by which He conquered death; if you believe it with all your heart, then you ought not to be a victim of the dead state of things all around you. You ought to be in a state of life triumphant, even though death presses on every side — and you can be. Your faith will put you in that position of ascendancy over death.

The Lord is truly seeking to get His company, by which the full issue of that life shall be displayed to this universe, wrought out in this universe, a translation company. The rapture may take place in the lifetime of many of us. That is a possibility, at least. Some of us feel that it is a probability, but if we leave it just as a possibility surely we should be in the succession of the apostle Paul, being completely stretched out, that it should be true of us that the final phase of His victory is displayed in us in a life which cheats the grave, and displays the fact that Satan, who had the power of death, is a truly conquered foe. May we live unto that from day to day.