FACING THE FUTURE

Our proclamation is from 1 Chronicles chapter 28 verse 20. These are the words with which David instructed Solomon how to go about building the temple. David spoke to Solomon in the second person, but when we make a proclamation we take it and make it first person. So this is how we will do it.

> "We will be strong and of good courage, and do; we will not fear nor be dismayed, for the Lord God—our God—will be with us. He will not leave us nor forsake us, until we have finished all the work for the service of the house of the Lord." Amen.

Now I want to turn to, I think, the briefest sermon ever recorded. You'll find it in Matthew chapter 9 verse 9, and it says,

> As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him.

That was a two word sermon, "Follow Me," and it produced a powerful result. I was thinking to myself, if I were asked describe my life in a few phrases what would be the best way to describe it. And I would take that as my pattern. The Christian life is following Jesus. It's not primarily a matter of doctrine or church membership or theology. It's a relationship to a person—following Jesus. And we turn back to the original call of the first apostles in Matthew 4 verse 18 and following:

> And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon 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."
> They immediately left their nets and followed Him.
> Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them,
> and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

So the initial call to the first disciples who were His apostles was very, very simple—"Follow Me." I think sometimes we have complicated this whole thing to the point where people get confused. Of course, that was at that time in that culture, the traditional relationship between a rabbi and his disciples. He

walked ahead and they followed behind. And following behind their teacher was the indication of their commitment to him as a teacher. And so Jesus said, "Follow Me." And then He said, "I will make you fishers of men."

When we follow Jesus it's not important what we are. What's important is what He will make us. But He will not make us if we do not follow. There's something He will only do for those who follow Him, who are committed to Him. And there was an immediate response. It says:

Immediately they left their nets…

And I believe there comes a time in the life of many of us when we have to make an immediate response. I recall in 1946 when I was still in the British Army in what was then Palestine, but I knew that God was directing me to be released from the Army in Palestine—and incidentally to marry Lydia. And I had been overseas away from home and my family for four and a half years. Because of my service, the British Army owed me a return passage to England. My grandfather, whom I dearly loved, was dying of cancer. He had been given up to die three and a half years earlier, but I had prayed and rashly, as new converts do, I wrote and said, "He won't die. I've prayed for him," and God spared him a further three years. But now he was at the end of his life, and I was weighing all these things—a free passage back to see my family, see my home country, see my grandfather, and I thought, Well, maybe I could squeeze that in and then get released from the Army in Palestine. And the Lord used to speak to me, and He still does, by tongues and interpretation, and I had this tongue and I got the interpretation, and I do not remember the exact words, but the picture was very plain. "The boat is at the dock. It's ready to sail. If you sail now you can sail with it. If you don't sail now you'll miss the boat. You'll never sail." And I realized that God had faced me with a decision—"Either now or never."

You know there was one man who said to Paul, "At some more convenient time I'll hear you." When people begin to talk about a more convenient time, they are planning to disobey. So I made the commitment and the decision to be released from the forces in Palestine and begin a career as a quote "missionary" without any commitment or support from any group anywhere, except those who supported

my wife, and I got on the ship and it's carried me ever since. But had I decided to wait I would never have got on the ship. I don't know how my life would have gone, but God's purpose for my life would never have been fulfilled. I would have missed the plan of God for my life.

And so when I hear that word *immediately* it means a lot to me. And I want to suggest to some of you, when God speaks to you or if He has spoken to you, if you don't respond immediately you will never respond. God is very, in a sense, ruthless. He doesn't give us a lot of options. Do it or don't do it. Now or never. But I have to say looking back a period of fifty years, I'm glad I did it.

I've traveled around. I used to do what they call deputation work for a mission—visiting churches and speaking. And I met two kinds of people—those who had heard the call, made the sacrifice and responded, and I never met one who was sorry they did it. I met others who knew they'd been called, but weighed it all in the balance and decided not to respond, and without exception they were unfulfilled, frustrated people.

I noticed something else about the first two pairs—Peter and Andrew, James and John. Peter and Andrew were casting the net; James and John were repairing their nets. And I think that's two basic types of ministry. The net casting ministry and the repairing ministry, and whichever you're called to, be faithful to it. Casting the net is what we would call evangelism. Repairing the net you could call pastoral or teaching. But if you don't have both you won't get the results, because from time to time the net will get holes. And if you cast a net with holes in it the fish will get out. That's happened time and time and time again. In my observation of evangelism, people have cast the net, the fish have been taken in, but there were holes in the net. They got out.

I have the deepest respect for Billy Graham, but I have to say from my observation, and Jeffrey has told you how I became his counselor, I didn't choose him, he chose me. I mean he looked around at me and "You." I counseled twenty-two persons in that initial Billy Graham Crusade, and we were instructed to maintain contact with them, write them, phone them, whatever. I did the best I could but out of the twenty-two people that made a quote "decision," I have no real assurance that any of them continued except the two who I became pastor of. I'm not saying they didn't, but I have very little confidence they

did. You see the problem? There were holes in the net.

Somebody said at that time when Billy Graham said, "Go back to your churches. If you don't have a church, find one." Some rather cynical person said, "That's all right but it's not good putting a live chick under a dead hen." And I mean this is a tragedy, because I've seen it happen again and again and again. If the net isn't repaired, if it isn't in order you can get the fish in but most of them will get out.

So I want to emphasize that the Christian life is first and foremost a relationship to a person. Doctrine has its place. It's very important. But if you only have doctrine and you don't have the relationship, you really don't have anything. Jesus said:

> I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father except through Me.

So there's only one way—it's Jesus. But many people enter the way and never get to the destination, because the destination is the Father. Jesus said:

> I am the way—the way to the Father.

Again, I meet many saved persons who've met Jesus but never had any relationship with the Father. In 2 Timothy 1 verse 12, right near the end of his life when Paul was in prison awaiting execution he said these words:

> I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I've committed unto Him against that day.

And I think it's very important that Paul didn't say, "I know *what* I have believed," He said:

> I know *whom* I have believed, and I'm persuaded that He is able to keep that which I've committed to Him.

If you only have a doctrine or a theory or a theology or church membership, but don't have a personal relationship with the Lord, you're missing it. You see, the revelation of the New Testament is relationship. The revelation of God is three persons, one God—Father, Son and Spirit. There is no God

denomination; there is no God organization. What is the Godhead? It's relationship. That is the ultimate revelation of God is relationship, and that's what God intends to bring in our lives—relationship with God, with one another.

I have to say, looking back, for years I was too concerned about doctrine and not enough concerned about relationship. When the Lord called me to be a teacher in 1944 with tongues and interpretation, He said, "I've called thee to be a teacher of the Scriptures," and that's the first time I knew there was such a ministry—"I've called thee to be a teacher of Scriptures in truth and faith and love which are in Christ Jesus—for many." And I could not in any way have imagined how many that would be. All the modern means of communication were really not in being at that time. Now you can record a message and it can reach thousands, hundreds of thousands, maybe millions of people. You can speak over the radio and it will reach a nation. All that was not in being. If God had tried to show me how many people I could reach my mind would not have taken it in. But I pondered on and meditated over the call—"In truth and faith and love which are in Christ Jesus." And I see there's a progression—truth, faith, love.

With my analytical philosophical background, the first thing I laid hold of was truth. I was really interested to know exactly what the Bible taught and how it related to various other parts. And so I emphasized truth. Then I realized it's no good having truth if you don't have the faith to make the truth work. So for a long while I emphasized faith. But then God began to show me that that's not the ultimate. You can have a lot of faith, a lot of truth, but if you don't have love you have nothing—I mean nothing. This is so important for us to understand. And so in the last I don't know, maybe ten years, more and more I've felt the thing to emphasize is love. And I say to myself, "If I don't produce love in the people to whom I minister, I'm creating problems." And I know I've created some problems, because people have taken hold of my teaching which is truth, but they've used it to destroy one another. Some of them have even turned it against me. And I said to myself, "What am I producing? Is that what I want?" So I come back to the emphasis on love; a personal relationship with God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That's the ultimate.

I want to point out one other thing about this call—well really, two other things. In Luke chapter 9 we

have at the end of the chapter a little list of people who came up as volunteers to Jesus. You may not understand this, but I don't believe God is calling for volunteers. In Israel we have all sorts of people who are volunteers for various organizations and groups. A volunteer works just as long as he or she feels; gives just as much or as little of himself or herself as suits their convenience; can come when they want to come and go when they want to go. I don't believe God is looking for volunteers. God is looking for conscripts.

When I was conscripted into the British Army in 1940 they didn't tell me, "Well, if you want to come on parade you can, and if you don't, never mind. You can serve a year and if that's all right, you can leave at the end of that." Nor did anybody give me a signed statement, "We guarantee you will not have to lose your life." A lot of Christians, or so-called Christians, serve on that sign of basis. "Well, I'll do as much as I want. I'll stay as long as I like and I will not have to lay down my life." That is not what Jesus is looking for. I believe as time goes on, more and more Christians are going to have to literally lay down their lives. This doesn't surprise me. It doesn't shock me. But let's listen for a moment at some of the people that volunteered. And you'd have thought Jesus being like you and me, He'd have got excited, but He didn't. In fact, He discouraged them. It's an interesting study—I can't go into it—but at times Jesus discouraged people. He only wanted a certain kind of follower, so we read at the end of Luke chapter 9:

> Now it happened as they journeyed on the road that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go."
>
> Jesus didn't say, "That's wonderful. Come along."
>
> He said, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."
> And He said to another, "Follow Me." [He took the initiative.] But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."

I don't think the father was dead. It meant, "As long as my father lives I've going to serve my father. At the end of that time I'll be available."

> Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God."

Pretty blunt isn't it?

> Another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house."
> But Jesus said to him, "No one having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

He was, in a sense, ruthless, wasn't He? When He called He commanded an immediate response and an unreserved commitment. He has not changed. That's what He's looking for today.

Now I would like to look at just one other passage before we come to minister, which I have really become excited about. It's in Revelation chapter 14. Sometime back I said to Ruth, "I don't think we know enough about the book of Revelation, so let's read it." We read the Bible together many times. Well, we read it once and I just didn't get anything. So I said, "Well, let's read it again." The second time I didn't get much. I said, "We'll read it again." The third time, as they say in slang language—I hit the jackpot—I got as far as chapters four and five and I could not get beyond them. Whenever Ruth would say, "What do you want to read?" I said, "Revelation four and five." This is the picture of heavenly worship and it's revolutionized my whole concept of worship. I can't go into it this morning, but I want to encourage you. God doesn't always meet you the first time you approach Him. Sometimes He may almost seem to discourage you, but don't give up. If there's a passage in the Bible that you feel called to study, study it twice, three times, four times, five times. Memorize it. Get it right inside you and one day suddenly it will come to light. Maybe when you're speaking to somebody else and suddenly God can give you a word from that passage for that person. So I want to speak about the hundred and forty-four thousand, about which there have probably been a hundred and forty-four thousand different theories. So as Bob Mumford would say, "How can I help it if I'm right?" You see, I can put the blame on Bob and I don't sound arrogant.

Well, you have to go back to Revelation chapter 7 to start with this hundred and forty-four thousand,

and there were twelve thousand out of twelve tribes of Israel. Dan was left out. I really am not sure I know why, but I think Dan blew it because they didn't go into their inheritance which was what Israel calls today, Gushdan, which is the Tel Aviv area, but they went right north to something that hadn't been given them as an inheritance, and they led Israel into idolatry. That's just a suggestion. It may not be the reason. But it's very interesting in Israel today the hardest place to reach people is the Gushdan area—Tel Aviv and round about. And I believe because the tribe of Dan never took their inheritance, there is a spiritual power over that area that has never been broken. Anyhow, twelve tribes contributed twelve thousand each. Now I have heard countless spiritual interpretations of this, but I am—I'll have to say I'm tired of spiritualizing the Bible, because you can make it mean almost anything you want. And I am naïve enough to believe that there will be twelve thousand descended from each of the twelve tribes—real Israelites, real Jews, unpopular though that may be.

And so we see in the first part of chapter 7—these, then we see a great multitude which no one could number, coming out of the great tribulation. My belief is that great multitude of Gentiles is the fruit of the testimony of the 144 thousand Jews. I am not Jewish so I'm free to say this, but when God chose the Jews He knew what He was doing. I hope nobody will get offended by that, but they have a special capacity to reach people. You take three Jewish names in contemporary history of this century, and if those names hadn't been there we'd have no ideal what the history would be like—Karl Marx, Freud and Einstein. Between them they have more or less formed this century, all Jews. Karl Marx, a very lapsed Jew, a wicked man. Freud, I would say, almost as wicked; and Einstein, a brilliant intellect.

I just hope I'm not offending anybody, but I am convinced that when God gets hold of a hundred and forty-four thousand Jews, the world is going to feel the impact. Bear in mind, I'm not Jewish. I'm as Gentile as anybody else, and I had no interest in the Jewish people. When the Lord saved me I was not the least bit interested. I had two Jewish friends at Cambridge, both of whom were called Kish, and they were so assimilated that, I mean, they might as well have been Gentiles for all that. That's all I knew about Jews. My family were good people, typical British upper-middle class. They would never have thrown Jews into concentration camps, but they all had an inner reservation when it came to talking about Jews.

Good cultivated decent people, but they were tainted with a spirit of anti-Semitism.

But when I was saved I was so ignorant—I didn't know you had to go to church, so I got saved in an army barrack room in the middle of the night. I was so ignorant I didn't know you had to wait six months to get any of the gifts of the Spirit, so the moment I was baptized in the Spirit, God began to give me gifts. The first gift He gave me was interpretation. And after that every time I prayed in tongues I would get an interpretation. In the end it became kind of a burden so I said, "Lord, do I really have to do this?" He said, "No, you choose if you want it or you don't want it." But almost every time I prayed, when I got the interpretation it was this—"I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." "Well," I said to myself, "so what? Why does He have to tell me that?" But after a little while it began to dawn on me He *is* the God, not He *was* the God. He *is* the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

And then He said an amazing thing to Moses, He said, "This is My name and this is My memorial to all generations, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Isn't it amazing that Almighty God chose to be known as the God of three men. But He chose it. And you can argue as much as you like with God, but He's not going to change His choice. That's the way it is.

So, I believe there are going to be twelve thousand out of each of twelve tribes that will come to Jesus and go forth to all the nations. This is my personal opinion. That excites me, because when we live in Jerusalem who knows whom we may be touching. In fact, a dear Messianic believer, who's a very close friend of ours, his wife heard me teaching this and they have five sons. One day the wife was praying, having heard my teaching on this, and she felt, that she felt the Lord said to her, "How would it be if you were to train up one of your sons to be one of those witnesses, one of the hundred and forty-four thousand?" See, that brings it really down to the point where we live. I believe we're that close to these developments that that's a real possibility.

So now we see the end of the hundred forty-four thousand—this is what we're coming to in Revelation 14. I have no doubt they're the same. It seems to me they have completed their earthly course, they have all laid down their lives for the Lord, and here they are in heaven. John says now in Revelation 14:

Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb…

I love that phrase, *behold the Lamb.* There's a beautiful song that Ruth can sing, I can't, Behold the Lamb. I love to behold the Lamb. I'm inspired when I behold the Lamb. It makes my blood tingle. It's exciting—behold the Lamb. Anyhow:

> Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and His Father's name written on their foreheads.

Now I believe these are the same, now they've completed their earthly course. And you find a distinctive mark. They had the name of the Father and the Son on their foreheads. You remember in chapter 7, first of all they were sealed by an angel before the rest of the story. So the seal apparently was the name of God the Father and God the Son on their foreheads. The ultimate conflict of Revelation is between people who carry seals—those who carry the seal for the Father and Son and those who carry the seal of the anti-Christ. And I think probably at the end of history there's going to be just two kinds of people—people sealed one way or sealed the other.

It's interesting. The antichrist is prepared to seal people either on their foreheads or on their hand. But not God. He only seals on the forehead. In other words, He requires your intelligent commitment. The anti-Christ—all he requires is that you'll do what he wants. He doesn't mind if he doesn't get your forehead, as long as he gets your hands.

So here they are, verse 2:

> And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpers harping with their harps. [That would be glorious wouldn't it?]
> And they [this is the hundred forty-four thousand] sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth.

So there are some songs that only some people can sing. I think that's probably true in other areas. To be able to sing a song, you have to have something inside you. And so only those hundred and forty-four

thousand could learn this particular song. Then they are described, verse 4:

> These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. They are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.
> And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault…

It's a wonderful description of a hundred and forty-four thousand people. It says they were virgins; they were not defiled with women. That leads me to believe they must be young. I would imagine they were all teenagers, because there's no defilement in being married, but there is defilement in fornication. So these were young people who had kept themselves pure. And if you know contemporary Israel today you'd have to look a long way to find one hundred and forty-four thousand that fulfilled that requirement. And then it says, and this is the key to everything:

> …they follow the Lamb wherever He goes.

That's the Christian life—following the Lamb wherever He goes. And then it says a wonderful thing:

> In their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault...

Faultless believers. Why were they without fault? Why are they or will they be without fault? What is the key? Tell me. Following the Lamb. You see, real morality and virtue is not a set of rules, it's not theology, it's a relationship with a person—following the Lamb wherever He goes.

That's what I want to challenge you with this morning as we begin to pray. Have you made up your mind to follow the Lamb wherever He goes? Ruth and I will gladly pray with you, but much will depend on your attitude and your response. Are you committed to follow the Lamb wherever He goes?