

Healing the Hearts and Minds

Pentecost

James Smyda

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Brethren, the seven annual holy days that the Bible reveals to us in God's plan teach us about the major steps through God's plan of salvation. The Bible tells us that God created mankind for the purpose of extending His family, for the purpose of offering the opportunity to carnal human beings to potentially be born into God's family and to become God-beings and to live eternally with Him. But to do that we have to take on God's nature. We have to develop His mind, to think and to act like Him in this life. And to do that requires a miracle because it's not something that we are capable of.

One of the things that the holy day plan teaches us is that we are fundamentally flawed. We are very fundamentally flawed as human beings in both our hearts and in our minds. We inherently have an evil heart and we are inherently drawn towards evil and drawn away from what is good. Not only is this an issue of our hearts, it's also an issue of our minds. In other words, it's not just the issue of not having the ability to get ourselves to do what's right. It's also the ability of not being able to really understand what's right or to even comprehend God's way. So, it's not just an issue of being able to do it, it's even the ability to understand the right way to go in the first place.

So to be able to develop God's mind and to live His way requires a miracle. It requires the miracle of God's holy spirit because it is His holy spirit that heals our hearts and our minds and enables us to be able to think like him, to even comprehend His ways, again, to try to change our nature to act more like Him.

What we're going to do today is look at this particular subject. So, if you would like a title for this sermon, it is

Healing the Hearts and Minds

We're going to focus on the need and what God's holy spirit does for us.

If you've ever taken a world history class maybe in college or in high school, you might have noticed that typically world history classes you might be able to sum them up with the phrase "the study of war" because if you look back over world history, oftentimes what you're studying about are the major wars and battles (because there are plenty of them) and it's all throughout world history. It's one right after the other and it's a lesson in how evil mankind can be to one another. Regardless of what society it is, what area it is, what time it is, and what culture they had, there is always war, strife, and man being evil to one another. It's one of the lessons of world history that we have been evil and corrupt in who we are throughout the entire history of mankind.

In fact, if we look back in the earliest recorded history that the Bible tells us about civilization, we find this very issue. Just to get started here, we're going to look at a time frame here that is approximately 1650 years from the time of creation. I say "approximately" because I don't want to get too dogmatic about dates, but, if you go through the Old Testament history and look at the life spans of certain people, and try to put that altogether you can date the flood at being about 1656 years from creation. But, again, I try not to get too dogmatic about those things in terms of exact dates.

The point I want to get at here is: From the time that God created mankind, it only took a little over 1600 years before things got so bad that God decided He was just going to wipe out mankind and start over.

To use a common analogy in our world today, God decided things got so bad He just needed to do a re-boot. He just needed to press Control-Alt-Delete on mankind, kind of wipe out, start over because things had gotten so bad. Why was that? What was the core of the problem? We'll start in Genesis 6:5.

Genesis 6:5. *Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*

6) *And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.*

7) *So the Lord said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."*

8) *But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. (NKJV)*

If you notice throughout the flood, God used basically Noah's extended family to continue on mankind. And it says here He wiped out everybody else in the flood, but the reason for that is the heart of man because the heart of man was evil in every way the intents of their hearts were just evil continually. And that's inherent to the human condition. That's why this problem got so bad that He had to wipe mankind out.

Oftentimes, we tend to think of it as it's just this society and, as we grow into adults, that corrupts us and makes us bad, but children are innocent and pure. Children are, by comparison to adults, typically more innocent and pure, but the Bible also tells us that even from our youth we have this evil in us. It's just inherent in who we are. If we look over a couple of chapters to Genesis 8, we'll pick up the story right after the flood in verse 20.

Genesis 8:20. *Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.*

21) *And the Lord smelled a soothing aroma. Then the Lord said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, ... (NKJV)*

Now notice the next statement here.

21b) ... although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done. (NKJV)

So He's telling us this is inherent to the human condition. Even when we're young, that same evil nature is in us. Yes, we're typically purer as children and as we grow up that tends to get worse, but that same issue is there. It's just inherent to who we are as human beings.

In fact, this is the very reason why God's Old Covenant relationship with Ancient Israel didn't work out well. Let's turn over to Deuteronomy 5 here and look at this particular issue. Just to sum this up, I'm sure you're familiar that God basically worked with Abraham's descendents. And once they had grown into a large nation, basically in captivity in Egypt, He delivered them from that captivity and wound up making a covenant with them. Now, salvation was not on the table in this covenant. It was a physical arrangement but He basically made a deal with them in which He said, "I'll be your God. You'll be My people. And if you'll follow these rules that I've given you, I'll make life wonderful for you. I'll make it a physical utopia." And God is only asking for letter of the law obedience from them. But as we know from history, this didn't work out so well either. They failed miserably in doing this. So, why was this? Let's pick up now in verse 28.

Deuteronomy 5:28. *"Then the Lord heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and the Lord said to me: 'I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They are right in all that they have spoken.*

29) Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever! (NKJV)

Notice here, God's saying that the reason things went badly with them was, again, this same heart issue because they just had an evil heart in them. And regardless of all the tools they were given for success, it didn't work out because, as human beings, they were inherently flawed.

Now there is an important lesson that we can learn if you look at the whole history of Ancient Israel. To state this I'll put this in the words that we oftentimes hear today in our society. There is a belief today that you might say is from a more politically liberal point of view. Look at humanity from this standpoint that the main cause of crime or other destructive negative behavior amongst human beings—behavior that we in the Church of God would refer to as "sinful"—that one of the main causes of that is poverty. In other words, it's poverty, it's oppression, it's discrimination, or other types of external forces that are the main causes for these types of problems. Based upon that logic that means if you could remove these problems—if you could remove poverty, if you could remove discrimination or racism or oppression of other kinds—then you would naturally see these people doing better behavior. You would see a change in all of this.

If you look at the history of Ancient Israel, it defies this principle because think about all of the tools they were given for success. This was a nation and they certainly were in captivity. They were slaves. They were being discriminated and oppressed against, but they are delivered from all of this. And not only are they taken out from under this, they are spoiled by the Egyptians with riches as they're leaving and they ultimately wind up taking over the Promised Land. They go into a land that is described as "flowing with milk and honey." Now, in an agrarian society where that's the backbone of your economy, that's a big step up. If you have a land flowing with milk and honey, you have good fertile land for your crops to grow.

But it gets better than that. They don't just take over a good fertile land and then have to start to build it all up. They get to take over intact cities. In other words, when they are basically taking over this area, they're driving out the people that were there before and there's an infrastructure already in place. If you're developing a civilization, there is a lot of work that comes in just building an infrastructure to support day to day life and the functions of a society. All of this is already intact. So as Israel comes in and takes over, they immediately get the advantages of all of this.

In addition to this, they're free. They're not oppressed by anyone else. There is no one over them. They get to govern themselves in the way that they want to. They have the freedom to do what they want.

In addition to that, they're given God's law. So, then now they have the know-how; they have the knowledge of how to structure a good society to make things work well because God has given them His law, His statutes, His judgments. All of this is delivered to them.

So, you have a people with all the major tools for success to make things work well. But how well did the movie turn out? If you think about over time what happened, they constantly want to rebel and go the wrong direction. And even over a multiple generation period, over multiple decades with this, it always keeps going the same way. And God always has to wind up sending different judges to them, different prophets to them to try to turn them back to Him, to try to get them back on track. They are constantly in and out of captivity, because they always keep turning in the wrong direction. So, in spite of being given all, you might say, the external factors that would be a recipe for success, it still doesn't work because the biggest problem was themselves. It wasn't these external factors. They were given all right external factors to be set up for success and they still failed because the inherent problem was themselves. As the old Pogo cartoon would joke: We have seen the enemy and he is us! That was the problem. They were the enemy themselves because that's who we are as human beings.

So turn over to Hebrews chapter 3. We'll see here the author of Hebrews is looking back at the same time and, again, speaks to this same issue, Hebrews 3:7.

Hebrews 3:7. *Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice,*

8) Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness,

9) Where your fathers tested Me, [and proved] Me, and saw My works forty years.

10) Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.'

11) So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'" (NKJV)

What was the core problem with them? Why did it keep going wrong? Because of an evil heart, because of a heart that always wanted to turn against God's way. If we just understand the nature of human beings, this isn't just a problem Ancient Israel had, it's a problem every human being in the history of mankind has had. It's a problem that we as individuals have to fight as well. It's inherent to who we are.

To just look at this turn over to Jeremiah 17 and we'll start in verse 5.

Jeremiah 17:5. *Thus says the Lord: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord. (NKJV)*

Notice again that issue. That's an inherent issue you always see coming up—hearts departing away from God.

6) For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when good comes, ... (NKJV)

Now we're going to look at this a little bit later as well, but notice it's not just an evil heart. It's the inability to even see what is right.

6b) ... but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land which is not inhabited.

7) "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord.

8) For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit.

9) "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? (NKJV)

That's who we are inside. When we repent before God, it's not just an issue of we've made some dumb decisions or that we've made mistakes in our lives. We certainly have. We're not just repenting of what we've done. We're repenting of who we are because inherently who we are is an evil nature. Not only are we deceptive to ourselves, not only do we lie to ourselves and to others, we have a nature that is naturally hostile to God's law and wants to push away the good and is attracted like a magnet to the evil. That's what we're inherently dealing with.

So, turn with me over to Romans 8:7.

Romans 8:7. *Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. (NKJV)*

Now the word “enmity” here in the New King James translation if you look in some other translations of the Bible, it’s actually translated as “hostile.” In other words, our nature is naturally hostile towards God’s law. We naturally want to repel and push away the good and we’re drawn towards the evil. Basically we’re drawn towards stupidity, if you want to put it in modern day terminology. We’re drawn towards this destructive dumb behavior, the bad decisions and the good things that will help us and be beneficial for our lives, we naturally tend to want to repel from those and have an aversion to them. We’re really insane when you think about the kinds of decisions we make, but that’s inherent to us as human beings of who we are. And there are no exceptions to this.

We like to delude ourselves sometimes and think “All the evil people, that’s those folks over there. That’s those people. They’re the ones with the problem but me and my family, we’re good.” That’s what we naturally want to tell ourselves, but that is a delusion. That’s part of that deceptive nature because it applies to us as well.

Turn with me over to Romans 3:9 and we’ll see that very thing.

Romans 3:9. *What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.
10) As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one;
11) There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God.
12) They have all [gone out of the way]; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one." (NKJV)*

Notice how that is said several times. There are absolutely no exceptions. It’s everybody.

13) *"Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit";
"The poison of asps is under their lips";
14) "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness."
15) "Their feet are swift to shed blood;
16) Destruction and misery are in their ways;
17) And the way of peace they have not known."
18) "There is no fear of God before their eyes." (NKJV)*

It tells us very clearly this evil inherent nature is in all of us. There are no exceptions. Everyone deals with it. “We are all the problem,” basically is what we are saying here. It’s not like the problem is with those other people; that’s the other guy. No, the problem is us and it’s inherent in all of us and it’s something we all have to face.

By a miracle, we all need to change who we are because we are incapable of doing it on our own. In fact, we're incapable of even grasping the right way to go. It's not just an issue of being able to get ourselves to do what we know is right. That can be a challenge by itself as well when you know to do good and just try to make yourself to do it. But the problem we're dealing with is bigger than that. It's the inability to even grasp the right way because without God's help we can't even find the right direction let alone get there.

Turn with me over to Proverbs 14:12.

Proverbs 14:12. *There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death. (NKJV)*

We read earlier in Jeremiah that we have a deceptive nature and that we tell ourselves lies. We will see a way that we think is right. In our heart we think "Well, this is the right way to go," but it's not because we inherently have a nature that is drawn toward stupidity. It's drawn towards the destructive behavior, the sinful behavior, and is adverse to God's way. So, we can't trust ourselves.

You hear a lot in our society, "Follow your heart." That's a bad idea because our hearts are evil. They're deceptive. And why is this? Turn over to Deuteronomy 29 and we'll start in verse 2 here.

Deuteronomy 29:2. *Now Moses called all Israel and said to them: "You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land —
3) the great trials which your eyes have seen, the signs, and those great wonders. (NKJV)*

And we're going to look at a number of examples here in a minute.

4) Yet the Lord has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day. (NKJV)

Notice that phrase when it talks about the eyes to see, the ears to hear. There are similar comments like that you will see throughout the Bible. The core of this issue is having God's spirit to give us the eyes to see, the ears to hear. That's what you'll see throughout the Bible. You'll notice a number of times in the Old Testament where he's referring that you don't have this. What he's saying is "God hasn't given you the ability to comprehend this." That's what he's saying, because as we're going to see as we go through this, it's God's holy spirit that gives us the eyes to see, the ears to hear to be able to comprehend the right way. Without that it's not just an issue of not being able to make ourselves do it, we can't even comprehend the direction we need to go in.

If you just notice throughout the Old Testament, this statement is made to Israel numerous times. Turn over to Isaiah 6:8.

Isaiah 6:8. *Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."*

9) *And He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'*

10) *"Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed." (NKJV)*

Conversion is that healing that heals our hearts and our minds with God's spirit, but God wasn't calling these people at this time for salvation. So what He's saying is, "You can tell them all day long all the right information and put it right in front of their nose, but it still won't do any good because they won't be able to comprehend it. They won't be able to do anything with it," because we have to have that miracle. That's one of the lessons of all of this. It does not matter how smart we are. It does not matter how much education we have. It does not matter how many years of experience we have. Without God's holy spirit, it's all meaningless because without that miracle we're not going to get it. The rest of it is irrelevant.

Let's turn over to Jeremiah 5:20.

Jeremiah 5:20. *"Declare this in the house of Jacob and proclaim it in Judah, saying,*

21) *'Hear this now, O foolish people, without understanding, who have eyes and see not, and who have ears and hear not:*

22) *Do you not fear Me?' says the Lord. 'Will you not tremble at My presence, Who have placed the sand as the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass beyond it? ... (NKJV)*

Notice again we have this that they can hear everything, they can see everything, but there is not the ability to process, to comprehend, to do anything with it.

Turn over to Ezekiel 12:1.

Ezekiel 12:1. *Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying:*

2) *"Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, which has eyes to see but does not see, and ears to hear but does not hear; for they are a rebellious house. (NKJV)*

Notice again, a blind and deaf people who don't have the ability to comprehend and a rebellious hard heart. We're getting back to those same issues of the heart and the mind where this comes down to.

But I think it's important for us sometimes to see graphic examples of where this really plays out. I think a lot of times when we study the Bible and look through different things, we see all these incredible things that happened throughout the Bible in the

history that we can see recorded here and we think “Wouldn’t it just be so wonderful if we could have seen these incredible events and we could have witnessed these miracles and these fantastic things God did!” Sometimes we think, “Man, if I could have just experienced those things and seen those things, then I’d have great faith. I’d never doubt God is I could just have experienced all these wonderful things!” But if we go through the example of the people who did experience this, it contradicts that concept completely.

Notice here and turn over to Exodus 14 and we’ll look at this very thing. We’ll start in verse 8, but before we do so, I just want to summarize some of the history that leads up to this. I’m sure most of this everyone is basically familiar with. Of course, you know this is the point where they were about to go through the Red Sea. There were a lot of dramatic events that led up to this particular event. As you know, God was working through Moses to free them from Pharaoh and a process played out there where there were ten major plagues that were brought upon the Egyptians.

So, by the point that the Israelites are experiencing what we’re about to read here, they’ve already seen some incredible stuff. They’ve seen water turned into blood. They’ve seen the plagues of the frogs and the flies. They’ve seen the darkness. They’ve seen the death of the firstborn. They have seen literally this prominent society of Egypt just reduced to its knees. Then, they’ve seen God interacting here and there was no question because Moses was telling everyone what was going to happen next and it happens. And he said, “Here’s the next thing that’s going to happen,” and it happens. There is a pretty good track record developing here that God is real consistent and He’s delivering Israel in every case. He’s performing these dramatic miracles and these people have firsthand witnessed these things, but notice their behavior with all the dramatic things they experience. Let’s pick up now in Exodus 14:8.

Exodus 14:8. *And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the children of Israel; and the children of Israel went out with boldness.*

9) *So the Egyptians pursued them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and overtook them camping by the sea beside Pi Hahiroth, before Baal Zephon.*

10) *And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord.*

11) *Then they said to Moses, "Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt?"*

12) *Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, 'Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness." (NKJV)*

Now, notice that they were crying out for a long time because in reality it wasn’t “Leave us here.” It was “We want out from under all this oppression.” Then they were

delivered from this, but the next time and every time basically the next trial comes upon them it's "God's against us. He doesn't love us. He brought us out here to kill us. And let's all stone Moses and blame him for it." These types of things just kept happening again and again regardless of what kind of fantastic miracles these people experienced. It didn't matter how much they experienced and how much they saw, this same problem just kept reoccurring because, if you notice here, they're about to experience some incredible things we're about to read here. So pick up here in verse 13.

13) And Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever.

14) The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace."

15) And the Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward.

16) But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea.

17) And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them. So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen.

18) Then the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gained honor for Myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen."

19) And the Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them.

20) So it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus it was a cloud and darkness to the one, and it gave light by night to the other, so that the one did not come near the other all that night.

31) Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided.

22) So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

23) And the Egyptians pursued and went after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen.

24) Now it came to pass, in the morning watch, that the Lord looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians.

25) And He took off their chariot wheels, so that they drove them with difficulty; and the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians."

26) Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians, on their chariots, and on their horsemen."

27) And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and when the morning appeared, the sea returned to its full depth, while the Egyptians were fleeing into it. So the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea.

28) *Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained.*

29) *But the children of Israel had walked on dry land in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.*

30) *So the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.*

31) *Thus Israel saw the great work which the Lord had done in Egypt; so the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord and His servant Moses. (NKJV)*

At least for a short period of time, because if you follow the history of this, it kept playing out again and again in terms of those dynamics. God would intervene and perform dramatic miracles for them. Then, of course, immediately when they're delivered, "God is great. Moses is great and we're on the right place here." Then the next trial would come up and it's "You brought us out here to kill us because there are no graves in Egypt. Why didn't you leave us alone and let us go back to Egypt?" This thing just kept happening again and again and again.

But these people watched a sea being opened up. They walked through the ground. They watched this close over the Egyptian army. If experience would make a big difference, this was a life altering event. You would never forget that for the rest of your life—seeing these types of things. But that didn't confer them with great faith. It didn't really change their hearts. They still had these problems regardless of what they experienced, regardless of anything that was done for them. Realize as they're going through the forty years in the wilderness, literally six days a week food falls from the sky. This was a daily event to see a miracle taking place. This was a daily thing in their lives, yet that still didn't change things for them. They still had great trouble believing and trusting in God in spite of everything they experienced.

The same was true for the apostles before they were converted as well. Turn with me over to Mark 8 where we can see some similar dynamics that played out with the apostles in terms of their ability to understand and even in how they lived because without God's holy spirit, there was just a ceiling they couldn't get beyond regardless of who they were taught by and what experience they had. Mark 8:13.

Mark 8:13. *And He left them, and getting into the boat again, departed to the other side.*

14) *Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat.*

15) *Then He charged them, saying, "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."*

16) *And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "It is because we have no bread."*

17) *But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, "Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened?"*

18) Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember? (NKJV)

We're going to come back to this particular point in a moment, but just notice here two things: He said, "Do you not understand?" and "Do you not remember?" It is understanding and remembering. I'll come back in a minute to why I'm making a point of that.

19) When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?" They said to Him, "Twelve."

20) "Also, when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up?" And they said, "Seven."

21) So He said to them, "How is it you do not understand?" (NKJV)

In other words, these guys worked with Jesus Christ face to face for three years. Over three years they were working with Him. And even though He is teaching them and there are all the things that they witnessed, notice a lot of their behavior until they got converted. Because, throughout their time with Him, they would have trouble grasping who He was and trouble acting with faith with this.

Just to give you a few quick examples: Do you remember there was a time that they were all actually in a boat together? And a storm comes up and the apostles are all scared. They wake up Christ and they say, "What's going on? We have this bad storm?" Christ gets up and He rebukes the storm. The winds and the seas calm down. And the apostles are blown away. "Wow! Did you see that? He commands the elements and they obey Him." Well, of course, they do. He's the one that spoke them into existence in the first place. It's not a big surprise that He could do that.

But all throughout their time with Him what kinds of things did they see? They watched Him turn water into wine. They watched Him heal people. They watched Him bring people back from the dead. Lazarus was dead long enough that he was starting to stink. There was no question this man was dead and Christ brings him back to life!

But notice at the end of Christ's life, when He is being arrested, and tried and killed, what happens? They all desert Him. They all turn their backs and run in other directions. Even Peter who said, "I'll be with You faithful till I die," said "I don't know Him. Why are you looking at me? I had nothing to do with Him." And Peter's running in the other direction. Just notice his behavior. These men are still doubting all of this. Even when Christ comes back later and the apostles say, "We've seen Christ," what does Thomas say? "I'm not going to believe that until I stick my hand in His side, my finger in the holes in His palms."

Think about this. Think of the track record that He had already established with them. They watched Him bring people back from the dead. They watched Him heal individuals. They watched numerous miracles, but, again, the experience they had, the education they had, all that they had gone through didn't really mean anything until they

had God's spirit, because, until we have that miracle to heal our minds to understand, it doesn't mean anything. We basically hit a wall that we cannot get beyond because it is who we are. We have to have that miracle for we can do nothing on our own.

The reason for this, turn over to 1 Corinthians 2:6. You can see here why Ancient Israel had such trouble understanding with all they experienced, why the apostles had such trouble understanding in spite of all they experienced.

1 Corinthians 2:6. *However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.*

7) But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory,

8) which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

9) But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, ... (NKJV)

Notice these phrases again.

9b) ... Nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." (NKJV)

But how do we get those?

10) But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

11) For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

12) Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. (NKJV)

So understand here we cannot, we are not capable of understanding God's way of life. As I mentioned, before it's not just an issue of being able to make ourselves do the right things. We can't even understand or comprehend the right things unless God performs the miracle to reveal it to us.

Let's notice also some more about this over in John 14:25.

John 14:25. *"These things I have spoken to you while being present with you.*

26) But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, [it] will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. (NKJV)

Did you notice before when we were going through Mark 8, I said to notice here Christ said, "Do you not understand and do you not remember?" Notice here He said "What the holy spirit is going to do for you?" It's going to teach you to understand and it's

going to bring things to remembrance because that's the gap that this heals. It enables you to grasp it and even to recall what you have been taught. Because, as you know, if you go through the gospels, there were a lot of times that Christ would be explaining things to the apostles and He would say, "You're not going to get it right now. It's going to go over your head, but I'm telling you this now so that you will remember later. And you will understand and this will make sense, what I'm teaching." Because He knew without the spirit, they weren't going to get it, but He was going to bring it into remembrance later and the light was going to go on and they were going to understand what He meant.

Now turn over to John 16:12.

John 16:12. *"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot [hear] them now.*

13) However, when [it], the Spirit of truth, has come, [it] will guide you into all truth; for [it] will not speak on [its] own authority, but whatever [it] hears [it] will speak; and [it] will tell you things to come.

14) [It] will glorify Me, for [it] will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.

15) All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that [it] will take of Mine and declare it to you. (NKJV)

The holy spirit doesn't just enable us to have the ability to understand God's way because, again, we can't comprehend it without it. It also can change the very nature of our hearts to enable us to get beyond this barrier of being just naturally hostile and adverse to God's way. Again, that's a battle we have to always fight, but if we yield to God's holy spirit, it can soften our hearts and enable us to obey God. So, turn over to Ezekiel 36:26 where we can see what this spirit can do for us. This passage of scripture is looking forward to a time in the future when God will grant His holy spirit to all of Israel and all of mankind.

Ezekiel 36:26. *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.*

27) I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. (NKJV)

So, God is saying this to a people who had an ongoing track record of never being able to keep and do His law. And God is saying, "When your heart is changed, this will be different and you'll have the ability to actually do this" because that's the miracle that enables us to obey God.

If you will, turn over to Deuteronomy 30:1 and we'll see where Moses himself mentioned this because he was, again, looking forward to this future time.

Deuteronomy 30:1. *"Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you shall call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God drives you,*

2) and you return to the Lord your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul,

3) that the Lord your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you.

4) If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you.

5) Then the Lord your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers.

6) And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. (NKJV)

We get into that circumcision of the heart because the holy spirit changes our hearts.

However, let's also look at the fact here that we can have God's holy spirit and we know that God's holy spirit gives us the ability to understand His way of life. It enables us to obey Him. It gives us the ears to hear and the eyes to see, but we have to be utilizing it. Just because we have been given the eyes to see, the ears to hear, we can have God's holy spirit and still not hear Him and still not be in tune if we're not utilizing it.

Again, as I mentioned here, if you look throughout the Bible, you'll see oftentimes this phrase the eyes to see, the ears to hear and it's oftentimes referring to those who do not have God's spirit. What is interesting though is if you look at the letters to the seven churches in Revelation, you'll find something interesting here. Turn with me over to Revelation chapter 3.

Now, just to summarize some of these seven letters: These are letters written specifically to the Church of God. And there are multiple applications to these particular letters. At the time that these were written, there were seven churches on a mail route that existed simultaneously at that time. Of course, that's one application of these seven. These are also spiritual conditions that can exist at any time throughout history. There are also, I believe, seven successive historical eras. In other words, these are conditions that predominate at different periods in time all throughout the New Testament church.

But what is interesting here is, again, these are all written to the church. If you read the letters, it will say, "To the church at Ephesus," "to the church at Smyrna," "to the church at Pergamos." We know who this is written to. Who is the church? Those who by definition are the people who have God's holy spirit, whose minds have been opened, who have been given that opportunity.

Every one of these letters, ends with the statement, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." And what is particularly interesting is if you look at the last one, you can tell from

the way it is worded, He's oftentimes expecting that a lot of them would not hear Him. And these are the people given the ears to hear.

Revelation 3:14. *"And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:*

15) 'I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.

16) So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will [spew] you out of My mouth.

17) Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' — and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked —

18) I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

19) As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

20) Behold, I stand at the door and knock. [Notice this!] If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

21) To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

22) "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.""
(NKJV)

Now personally I'm a big believer that if you look at this letter—if we honestly look at this and we honestly look at the greater Church of God in our time around us—we are solidly in this era. And, as you read through this letter, it's not very complimentary, is it? It's a scathing condemnation and it says that you're in a horrible condition. But notice this: The Church of God by definition is those who have been given God's holy spirit, which means these are the people Jesus Christ should be living in. And what's the picture there? Jesus Christ is on the outside knocking on people's lives saying, "Let Me in." That's a very frightening picture.

But also notice this. These are the people that by receiving His holy spirit have been given the "ears to hear." And He's out here knocking, saying, "Can anybody hear Me? If anyone hears Me, hopefully, I'll come and work with you, but I'm kind of afraid no one's going to hear Me." Why would that be the case? Why would the people who have been given the ears to hear not hear? How would that work? What would be the problem? Obviously these are people that, even though they have been given the ears to hear, have developed a hearing problem.

Turn with me over to Hebrews 5. We're going to pick up in verse 9. Here the author of Hebrews is basically addressing Jesus Christ in His role as Melchizedek.

Hebrews 5:9. *And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,*

10) called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek,"
11) of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, [Why?] since you have become dull of hearing. (NKJV)

In other words, these are people who have been given the ears to hear, but they're not hearing. Their hearing is going away just like someone who has had good hearing and develops a hearing problem as it slowly dwindles. That is the analogy that's being given here, but this is spiritual hearing.

12) For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

13) For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.

14) But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (NKJV)

In other words, if we have a shallow understanding of this book and we don't spend much time reading and studying it, that's what happens. Even though we can have the ears to hear, the eyes to see, years of experience with it, we can have our hearing dull. And we can slowly and insidiously lose that, not really paying attention.

Recently I saw on Facebook—I'm sure a lot of you have Facebook accounts and you see how people oftentimes will post different cartoons or jokes or things of that nature. But a friend of mine put up a picture one time in the last couple of months that just really struck me. It was a cartoon of a guy who is praying to God. He's down on his knees and he's looking up. You see the clouds above him and he's hollering out "Lord, please talk to me. Please talk to me!" And the very next frame you see down through the cloud is a hand holding a Bible. Basically, He's saying, "I'll talk to you if you read it." Of course, it doesn't have that caption, but that's the point you get because you just see this big Bible being handed down like "If you would open that, I'd talk to you."

How often in our own lives do we have time for everything else but this? Do we get busy and think, "Hey, I've studied this for years. I know what it says. I've been around forever. We can do the same thing. We can wind up becoming dull of hearing and not getting into it—or if we just never hear sermons that teach us.

A couple of months ago I was talking to a good friend of mine that's been in the Church of God for many years. He attends a major church of God organization back in Texas where I'm from. He was making the comment to me and he wasn't really complaining. He was just talking and reminiscing over different times. He looked at me and he said, "I feel like lately something's missing. I don't think we hear any exhortation anymore." He said, "I feel we get taught at church, but we don't really get exhorted to grow and that we need to repent and change." He goes, "I think as human beings we need that," because we do.

What can happen sometimes is if we get into that environment of just getting comfortable and we never grow and we're not trying to personally overcome, our church environment can become a social club. Of course, there is a social aspect of supporting each other but if it only becomes the social aspect of it and we're not personally growing and overcoming, we can without knowing it become dull of hearing. And we can slowly just slide into the people of Jesus Christ where He's on the outside knocking on our lives, saying, "If anybody hears me, I'll come in and live with you." But if we're not seeking Him out, are we having a connection with Him? This can happen to us not just from neglect of study, but also of our personal lives.

Turn with me over to Matthew 25:1. We're going to look a common parable in the church of God here. I think a lot of times we miss one of the deeper lessons of this particular parable. It's the Parable of the Ten Virgins. Oftentimes I think when we look at this parable we look at lessons of enduring to the end and preparing for the long haul and things of that nature, which are certainly valid spiritual lessons, but that's not really the core message I think this particular parable is getting at.

Matthew 25:1. *"Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.*

2) Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

3) Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them,

4) but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

5) But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

6) "And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!'

7) Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.

8) And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.'

9) But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.'

10) And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

11) "Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!'

12) But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.'

13) "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming. (NKJV)

Notice we have a frightening picture here. We have a 50 percent attrition rate. That's basically what this is saying. Half of them neglected their duties and wound up at the end losing out on the opportunity for salvation. But how did that happen? Oftentimes we think of this in terms of enduring to the end, preparing for the long haul. And, again, those are valid spiritual lessons. But is that really what this parable is telling us? If we go through this as a jigsaw puzzle, I think we see a deeper lesson here.

So, first of all, let's understand what the symbols are referring to here. Notice it said all ten virgins had lamps. They're all taking lamps with them. Let's just interpret this from the Bible what this means. Quickly turn over to Psalm 119:105.

Psalm 119:105. *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (NKJV)*

In other words, it's making the analogy that God's word is like a lamp that can guide us with light to tell us where to go. This is the lamp because these are all virgins; they're all spiritual virgins. These are converted Christians that we're referring to here and they all have a lamp. They all have this book to guide them.

As we've already seen previously in this sermon, what is it that enables us to understand God's word? What is the oil that enables that lamp to give us light? It's God's holy spirit. So, what we know here is that all ten of them started out having this book. Their minds had been opened and, as we read later, all of their lamps eventually went out. That means it was burning for everybody initially, which means that they all had the ability to understand it.

Now there was a point where they all wound up sleeping and slumbering, being spiritually asleep, but when they woke up, some of them had the oil in their vessels to begin with and others didn't. And here's why I say oftentimes that we think of this in terms of preparing for the long haul because this wasn't the issue of carrying an extra gas can, you might say, of oil with them. You know sometimes we run by and get an extra can of oil or things we might need and have some extra supplies around just to help us out in a shortage. That's not really what this is getting at.

We need to understand what's meant by the "vessel" here because if we let the Bible interpret what the vessel is, we get a deeper lesson here. Turn with me over to Acts 9:15.

Acts 9:15. *But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.
16) For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."
(NKJV)*

We're referring here to Ananias baptizing Paul and, then, Paul becoming God's servant, but God is saying that He's going to use Paul as a "vessel." In other words, Paul's life, his body will be a vessel.

Turn over to 1 Thessalonians 4:3 and we'll see the Bible also uses this term in a similar way.

1 Thessalonians 4:3. *For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality;
4) that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, (NKJV)*

So, you see there are a number of cases where the Bible will use the term “vessel” to refer to a person’s life or to the human body. Now think of the parable in this context.

All of the virgins had a lamp. We know that’s a symbol of the Bible; it’s a symbol of God’s word. They all had oil in their lamps—in other words, the ability to understand it (for the lamp to give light to them) and God’s holy spirit, but the wise had it in their vessels and the foolish didn’t. What’s the lesson we’re getting at here? All of them had the ability to understand, half of them had it in their vessels—in their lives. They were actually living it. By actually carrying it out in their lives, that’s what actually sustained them.

Just having the ability to understand wasn’t enough and it didn’t work because over time those that didn’t have it in their vessels, what happened to them? Their lamps started going out. If we’re not actively living in the right direction, what eventually happens is our understanding wanes. That’s why I can say that the biblical criteria for assessment is “by their fruits, you shall know them.” If you look at Matthew 7, Christ says, “You shall know them by their fruits,” and Galatians 5 gives us that list of fruits. What is it? It’s a list of behaviors. It’s how we live. It’s actually carrying out and living what God teaches us. Because, if we’re not doing that, what eventually happens? Our understanding wanes and our ability to put this book in proper order wanes.

The reason I mention that in terms of proper order if you notice all the virgins got up and they trimmed their lamps. If you think about an oil lamp, you have a physical wick that basically burns on a lamp and you typically would trim that wick. You’re cutting part of it off. When I first starting studying that, I was thinking: If the lamp is the word of God, what part of that would you trim and cut off? Well, you wouldn’t in that sense because that’s not really what this is getting at.

The Greek word thee for “trimmed” there is the Greek word “kosmeo.” It’s k-o-s-m-e-o, Strong’s #2885 and it means *to put in proper order*.

Now if you think of it in that context, we get a totally different idea here. With the Bible, there is nothing in this book that we would think it’s now useless and throw it aside, but you do put it in proper order in two different ways. One is in priority of your life. Is it top priority in your life? The other, as we know, is line upon line, scripture upon scripture, precept upon precept—in other words, putting it together in the proper order to come to the right conclusions.

If a person is not living that in their own life—not only actively studying this word, but putting it into practice in their own personal life—if they get overcome with their own personal sins what happens is the ability to place it in proper order gets compromised and their understanding starts going away. That’s why it says with the foolish that what happened was their lamps were going out. They still had a lamp but it just didn’t have the ability to give light anymore. They didn’t understand it anymore. That’s what can happen to us if we wind up taking it for granted and not appreciating the incredible gift

that's been given to us and if in our own lives don't make a priority of it to where we have time for everything else and we think "Oh, I've studied this book for years. I've been around for decades. I don't need to read it." What happens? We slowly and deceitfully start losing that and we wind up becoming those who just need milk, who have become dull of hearing because by reason of use—they haven't had the reason of use to exercise their senses because they're not using it anymore—and then we wind up being the people where Jesus Christ is on the outside knocking, saying, "If anyone hears Me, and will let me in."

What ultimately happens, if we let all of this come about, is we're told in 2 Timothy 4:1.

2 Timothy 4:1. *I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom:*

2) Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

3) For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;

4) and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

5) But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (NKJV)

What Paul is telling Timothy is this would happen to people who would turn away from the truth. To be able to turn away from it, you had to be to understand it in the first place, because we're talking about people who have been given the ears to hear, the eyes to see and by neglecting that—by neglecting their own study, by neglecting their own personal commitment in their day to day lives—wind up losing that. That's why you get this picture of there are ten virgins and half of them don't make it. It's because they neglected that. They allowed time to wear them down, to wind up slowly taking that away from them and getting consumed in their own personal sins and in their own life because this evil nature is something we all have. Just because we've been in the church for many decades, it doesn't go away. It's an evil we all have to fight on a daily basis.

Just because we've been given this ability and we've been granted this incredible gift with the eyes to see, ears to hear doesn't mean we can't lose it. And it doesn't mean we can't let it slip through our fingers if we neglect it. Because, again, we can become those dull of hearing if we don't exercise this, if we're not pouring into God's word, if we're not partaking of meat and seeking it out. If we just sit and think, "Well, I've known this for years. I understand the truth," and don't continue to study and try to overcome, what naturally happens is we start regressing and we start falling backwards. So even though we've been given this incredible opportunity--we've been invited to be at the marriage supper, we've been invited to be firstfruits and given this incredible gift and this understanding—if we don't appreciate it and actively use it, we're going to lose it. Just because we've been given the ears to hear and the eyes to see doesn't mean that we can't lose it, that we can't let that incredible opportunity slip away from us.

So, on this day of Pentecost, let's be very grateful for the facts that not only we have this opportunity and that we've been given the chance to receive God's holy spirit but let's make sure we're utilizing it so that we are never the ones not hearing that knocking on the outside of lives and wind up eventually hearing those words—those frightening words from Jesus Christ—"I never knew you."