

Seeing Our Finish Line

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This is a new Feast site for us and usually when we're sitting in the audience (which we've been doing for years and years) everyone else has been doing the work. That's not the case this year, in a new site. We have to give accolades to the crew that sets up, because it takes two days to do. Then there's the matter of dealing with the hotel and all of that, and then of course Murphy—of Murphy's Law, who seems to be alive and well—because we've had our glitches and that's just the way it goes.

Before I get started I want to clear up something. I walked into my chiropractor the other day and of course I know the receptionist, who knows me by name and I know her by name. (When you're on a first-name basis with your chiropractor, that tells you something—years ago you were on a first-name basis with your bartender.) Anyway, she asked me how I was doing; she always does that, offers a little courteous conversation as I come in the door. I said, Jocelyn, I don't know; I think I'm just getting old. She said, Jack, you're not getting old, you're just seasoned. I know she was just trying to put a positive spin on my being there. I looked the word up and thought I would throw it out there. Seasoned, an adjective that means experienced; mature; practiced; old (there you go—I knew I was old); weathered; long-serving; battle-scarred (I've got some of that); time-served; well-versed (I don't know about that); and, I added one—used and abused. That's got nothing to do with my sermon but I thought I would throw that out there; it might help explain a little about me as I give the sermon.

Probably few of you remember this (and there are some younger folks here who weren't even around then, in 1992), when the summer Olympics were held in Barcelona, Spain, and there was a young athlete named Derek Redmond, who was highly favored to win metals in the 400-meter race. The race began, the gun went off, they all took off down the track, and 150 meters into the race, Redmond snapped a hamstring muscle and just collapsed onto the track. He said later it felt like he had been shot, it was so painful. The emergency crew came running out with stretchers to take the poor guy off the track, and most people would have accepted the stretcher. I know I probably would have. He was in a great deal of pain. This was all on video; if you want to google the 1992 Olympics I'm sure it's probably still there.

I watched the video and it was heartbreaking to see this young man all alone out there on the track in a great deal of pain. His father rushed out—of course his father was in the audience—and he had to see his son in all this agony. In fact, he had to charge through the security that tried to stop him from coming out on the track because spectators are not allowed there. Redmond was in such great pain that he wept on his dad's shoulder. You have to appreciate that he had this terrible pain, plus the crushing disappointment that all of his hard work, to even be in the Olympics, was gone in a heartbeat. He said, Dad, I have to cross the finish line. His dad said, you don't have to

do this Derek, and he replied, yes, I do. Years later people won't remember who won that race but you know at the very end of it (and it shows us on the video), 65,000 spectators rose and gave Redmond a standing ovation. What a great story—I love that story.

Spiritually speaking though, all of us have a finish line to cross, and of course that ultimate goal is God's Kingdom. Here was Derek Redmond, a young man—all heart, all courage—who clearly saw that finish line, and the question for us is, do we clearly see our finish line into God's Kingdom? I'd like to turn over to Luke 12 to begin. I'll be using the New King James, sometimes the New Living Translation. The context there, as we know—it's a very familiar scripture—is about being anxious for the things in life. We all deal with that on a daily basis. Here in verse 31 of Luke 12, Christ says:

Luke 12:31 *For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you.*

32) *“Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (NKJV)*

For us, God's Kingdom is the finish line. It's not a wait point, like the place of safety, that we used to think of as the goal. God's Kingdom is the goal—that's the real finish line, the one we should be looking for and the one we want to cross. The last part of verse 32 says it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom; if you look up good pleasure in the Greek, it just means it's a done deal in God's mind. It's there waiting—it's a done deal. Also in Luke 15, verse 7, we know this is the parable of the lost sheep.

Luke 15:7 *I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance. (NKJV)*

This describes the joy in heaven—from all the angels, from the Father, from Christ—and you can imagine the emotions. We saw the emotions that the crowd demonstrated toward Redmond when he crossed the finish line. Can you imagine the emotion that will be displayed when we cross our finish line? I don't know about you, but I get kind of teary at funerals, at weddings—because of the sadness and also because of the joy. Marie and I renewed our vows at our 25th year and you wouldn't think you could get that excited twenty-five years into your marriage, but I was really emotionally kind of a wreck that day. Here comes that beautiful bride up that aisle—that was just a great thing for me. The emotion of billions of angels as they shout for joy as we cross our finish line. That's quite a picture if you think about it. Of course we have many physical goals in life—all of us do. We all have to go out and make a living, we go to school, we go to college, or whatever we're going to do. For us, spiritually, God's Kingdom is our ultimate finish line. If you would like a title, the title of this is:

Seeing Our Finish Line

Because that's what we need to do. Obviously, we're in the Feast of Tabernacles season and we'll see a lot of different pictures from the different speakers. God uses us all as filters and that's a good thing—even us old filters. As we go into the Feast, as we start the Feast of Tabernacles, it basically pictures a new government on the earth and we're destined to have a part in that. The Millennium, per se, is not God's Kingdom; that's only one step in the process. Actually, I kind of liken it to the change in administration we have in our nation every four years, nationally, and on the state and local level, and all of that. Nationally we have a change of administration every four years and maybe every eight years—it depends on how lucky the incumbent is and how unlucky the nation is. (I thought that was funny.) But the point is, in the case of God establishing his Kingdom, it's going to be a worldwide change of administration that's going to last forever. It's going to be never-ending.

What I would like to do in the sermon is look at three areas that have to do with our part in that soon-coming administration, whenever we cross that finish line. What I'll try to do is paint a picture of the what, why and the how of our function—what it will be—once we make that entry into God's Kingdom. God's government is going to replace an existing system, so the question is, what system are we talking about? That's what we'll look at first.

If you would be turning over to Revelation 17, let's take a scriptural look at what we're talking about. Revelation 17 is an inset chapter right after the seven bowl plagues; we'll be reading from the New King James, Revelation 17, verse 1.

Revelation 17:1 *Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters ... (NKJV)*

Note that word *judgment*; we're going to see more of that again later on.

2) with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication." (NKJV)

We know that's a spiritual kind of fornication—that it's spiritual in nature.

3) So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

4) The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication.

5) And on her forehead a name was written: (NKJV)

You realize that God isn't confused at all; He absolutely identifies this individual.

5) *MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS [we know that means the offspring, all false religions] AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.*

6) *I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement.*

7) *But the angel said to me, "Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.*

8) *The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.*

9) *Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. (NKJV)*

It begins to explain the imagery here.

10) *There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time.*

11) *The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition. (NKJV)*

As we wade through the math here,

12) *"The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast.*

13) *These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast.*

14) *These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; [note the part for us] and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful."*

15) *Then he said to me, "The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. [We understand the symbolism here.]*

16) *And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire.*

17) *For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose ... (NKJV)*

And God always has a purpose for whatever is going on in the world, even for this.

17 continued) *... to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. (NKJV)*

God has a plan in them, God engineers this.

18) *And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth." (NKJV)*

So we have a picture here of a system of government that is going to come to an end. We know the origin of that is Satan, the author of confusion (and probably the force behind Murphy's Law). That can all be traced back to the Garden of Eden. We know what happened there; Satan convinced Adam and Eve to disobey God, and, in effect, they chose to govern themselves.

You might be turning over to Daniel 2. Later on, well after the Garden of Eden, Nebuchadnezzar's empire actually set the model for what we see today. Babylon was the model. I retired from a corporation—you can see that kind of a structure, the same structure that we find today, and we'll talk a little bit more about that later. It was a system in Babylon, and again, it kind of set the structure for many corporations, nations, all that kind of government. It organized, it merged religion with government, and together, that formed a pattern that prophecy says is going to be reproduced at the time of the end. It's a religious/economic/political/military system that will rise on the scene today. As we all well know, if we are awake at all on this planet, all the ingredients are there. It could happen any time. We know that God revealed an interpretation of a dream to Daniel that foretold the system and He explained its meaning. In Daniel 2:28, the context here is the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, who couldn't interpret the dream for the king—but Daniel does.

Daniel 2:28 *But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. (NKJV)*

Unless time keeps marching on, we are in the latter days.

28 continued) ... Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed, were these: (NKJV)

He begins to explain the dream to the king.

29) As for you, O king, thoughts came to your mind while on your bed, about what would come to pass after this; and He who reveals secrets has made known to you what will be.

30) But as for me [Daniel says], this secret has not been revealed to me because I have more wisdom than anyone living ... (NKJV)

Not because he was great and all-knowing as some claim to be in their prophetic ramblings. How many "Two Witnesses" have we seen?

30 continued) ... but for our sakes who make known the interpretation to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your heart. (NKJV)

I emphasize *for our sakes* there. Those were the people who obeyed God at that time—Daniel and his three friends. There may have been other Jewish captives there, we don't know; we have only the record of these four: Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. We can see by the examples shown by Daniel and these few that they

trusted God, and that's going to be crucial for us in the times ahead. It started with the unclean food offered, and God helped them through that. They didn't want to eat the food that everyone else was being given. They asked for vegetables—I'm not sure what was on the menu then, but they refused the unclean food. They refused to worship an idol and God helped them through that—Daniel's practice of praying when he did, at intervals, and the decree from the king that anyone who did was going to be killed. Daniel was thrown in prison—thrown to the lions, actually; it was thought they were going to kill him but God again delivered him. The point is, if they hadn't looked to and trusted God in all that, while under that system, they wouldn't have survived—they just simply wouldn't have. There's a huge lesson for us.

Just as a reference scripture, Revelation 18:4 says what? Come out of her, lest you share in her sins and receive her plagues. That's what we need to do. God wanted the people He was working with on a personal level to know He had a long-range plan for the government of man. He wanted them, and by extension us, too, to know that eventually that system would come down; it would come to an end and a truly righteous government would be established on the earth when Christ returned. At the time of the end it's going to be a man-made system. It goes way back to Babylon—same system, same structure. If you analyzed it, if you took it apart, and did a vertical slice on it, you would see many of the same ingredients there.

Revelation—we won't turn over there yet—but Revelation 17 and 18 tell us a lot about that system in the last days; I'm sure we've read that many times. A lot of that system is going to revolve around global trading. Revelation talks about the great men of the earth, how they wail over this and that—no one is buying our stuff anymore; we can't do this; we can't trade internationally; there's the end of our luxurious living; we're all crying about it. We know from all that, that a lot has to happen. Whatever we see, whenever that does happen, there will come a fundamental change to the system that we see today. We also see, coinciding with all of this, a great harlot church—a false church—behind that system. It thrives on power and control and it shares that. It's a false church with a charismatic prophet, who is able to mesmerize the world with whatever he does, even with miracles that he is somehow able to perform. That system also has a ruler called the beast, who is also charismatic. It's interesting, the tie-in, the connection there: God turned Nebuchadnezzar into a beast; I see a connection there. I haven't studied that in-depth, but I believe there is a connection.

We know that whole system is Satanically inspired. It started and developed in Babylon and those are the conditions that will exist on the earth. Somewhere in there is our personal finish line, and we have to cross it. We can look at it academically, and say, that's a pretty big picture but we have to ask ourselves—and this is getting to the second area—where do we fit in all this? Where are we going to fit in it? We're not called just because God looks down and says, there's a bunch of people down there that I need to work with, and maybe get them to quit smoking and all the stuff we did pre-conversion; we're called because God wants to replace that corrupt system with His government, comprised of His family, and that's us. We used to say we're in training; well, we are. I've mentioned it before but for folks who don't know me, I retired as a

training specialist; I was an instructor at a nuclear power plant. I used to develop classes and give them but my favorite part was the hands-on; that's what I liked to do. I was a technical instructor. That's what we're doing in our life. We do all the things we need to do—make a living and all of that—but we're in the hands-on phase of this, developing in the character and everything else that God wants us to do. We should still be in Daniel; let's go to Daniel 7 and see what it talks about there. In Daniel 7 we see the final days of that governing system, called Babylon the Great. The context here is Daniel is having a series of dream-like visions.

Daniel 7:7 *"After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns [more power].*

8) I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words. (NKJV)

Here we have an individual coming on the scene—he has great confidence in himself and his system, and he's speaking pompous words against God, the Most High.

9) "I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated;

There He is, the Most High on His throne, between the cherubim, above all the spirit beings; He is the Living God, the Being that we know became the Father.

9 continued) His garment was white as snow, And the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, Its wheels a burning fire; (NKJV)

You might recognize this picture that you see in Ezekiel also.

10) A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened. (NKJV)

A judgment was going to be made. That's an important time for you and for me.

13) "I was watching in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! (NKJV)

So we come to this time when the courts are seated and judgment is on the Babylonian system that has shaped the world in which we live.

13 continued) ... He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. (NKJV)

This is all a picture of Christ, the Messiah returning and coming before the Father's throne, ready to administer God's rule on the earth—it starts here.

14) Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed. (NKJV)

That's where you and I get involved. We come to this picture at that point, if we're faithful to the end. Hold your place in Daniel, we'll be coming back here. Go to Revelation 20, verses 4 through 6. We know the context; Satan is bound and not able to deceive anymore. This is from the New Living Translation.

Revelation 20:4 *Then I saw thrones, and the people sitting on them had been given the authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony about Jesus and for proclaiming the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his statue, nor accepted his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They all came to life again [they were resurrected or changed], and they reigned with Christ for a thousand years. [That's us.]*
5) *This is the first resurrection. [Then the NLT says, parenthetically,] (The rest of the dead did not come back to life until the thousand years had ended.)*
6) *Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. For them the second death holds no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him a thousand years. (NLT)*

God the Father and Christ are reigning together in the context of the Millennium. In verse 4, we see those sitting on thrones, judging. Of course, the apostles are going to be given twelve thrones, but there are going to be other thrones; the symbolism there is to rule and when you think about all that, the sheer scale of it is staggering—reigning with the Father and Christ, sharing judgment over the whole earth. I don't know about you, but I don't feel my background or all the experience of my life up to now really prepared me for that. I think the implication is, and the answer has to be, at that point we will know what we need to know to make those judgments. How else could that work? I can't think of any other way that would work. Let's go back to Daniel 7; we'll continue looking at this second area. Prophecy clearly shows we have a part in all of this that's going to happen. Daniel 7, verse 17.

Daniel 7:17 *Those great beasts, which are four, are four kings which arise out of the earth. (NKJV)*

Four kingdoms: Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Macedonian, or Alexander the Great—it was all divided—then came the Roman Empire, and I remember all this from the old correspondence course. Is that still accurate? I'll have to check. In verse 21, it's a re-emergence of that same system and it's telling about it here.

21) *“I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them ... (NKJV)*

Before we get that job, before we get that responsibility, we’re going to have to go through this war—a war that is against the church, against God’s people.

22) *until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High [that’s clearly a reference to Yehovah, and at this point, the court is seated and the judge is on our side for a change] and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom. (NKJV)*

The time is going to come when the saints possess the kingdom—under Christ, under the Father.

23) *“Thus he said: ‘The fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all other kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, trample it and break it in pieces. (NKJV)*

Historically that is what the Roman government did; they would simply absorb all the people they conquered, as well as their governments, and they would replace their system. They would implement the Roman system.

24) *The ten horns are ten kings who shall arise from this kingdom. And another shall rise after them; he shall be different from the first ones, and shall subdue three kings. (NKJV)*

Again, a succession here.

25) *He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High ... (NKJV)*

That is coming down to the end and it’s someone who is very arrogant; he’s going to be the head of that system and all the nations are going to throw their support behind him—this kind of a leader.

25 continued) *... and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time. (NKJV)*

That’s the tribulation.

27) *Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him.’ (NKJV)*

It's very plain there, where we can see the kinds of responsibilities we will have. Leaving Daniel and going over to Zechariah 14, it talks a little bit more about this same time frame.

Zechariah 14:1 *Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. (NKJV)*

Talking to Jerusalem.

2) *For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished [this is going to be a terrible time]. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. (NKJV)*

We can only imagine which half goes into captivity and which half is going to suffer these terrible things.

4) *And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south.*

5) *Then you shall flee through My mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Thus the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with You. (NKJV)*

It shows here in the context where the saints—we, the saints—begin to emerge on the scene as individual spirit beings and rulers. Let's go to Matthew 19; what I'm trying to paint here is this whole picture, and it should have a good deal of impact on every one of us as we see our part in it. If we can see our part in it. Over in Matthew 19:28,

Matthew 19:28 *So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory [He's talking to the disciples here, soon to be apostles], you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (NKJV)*

When you think about these guys, were they really any different than we are? Some were fishermen, tax collectors and all that. They weren't government administrators, they weren't mayors, presidents, any of that. Christ didn't go around looking for such individuals. He had the Jews, and they had many lawyers, many legal experts, the educated of that day—He could have picked from among them, but what did He do? He picked guys that had nets in their hands, that had fish stink on their hands, and a tax collector; He said, I'm going to make you fishers of men, and He put them to work. He told those there, someday you're going to have a throne and you're going to rule—way, way into the future. Let's back up a couple of chapters to Matthew 17—it's an interesting picture here for us. This is talking about the transfiguration.

Matthew 17:1 *Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves;*

2) and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.

3) And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. (NKJV)

They weren't alive there—that was a vision, a projection far into the Millennium.

4) Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." (NKJV)

That gives us an amazing vision of the transformation from a human being to a spirit being. Christ was the firstborn among many brethren, which means we're going to do that too. We're going to be born among those brethren—we're going to be transformed very similarly to what this vision says here. We don't know exactly how that's all going to work out technically but we have a glimpse of that here in the transfiguration. We can see what will take place when Christ returns. We're just going to be different—hopefully we're going to be very different—than we are now. The point I'm trying to make is just, can we see the incredible?—when we think about it, we're not really prepared for that now, it doesn't seem like we're preparing for that; we're going to have incredible ability. God is going to give that to us—incredible power; that's what we're going to have.

In our congregation, a few years back, we had an elderly man, who had a lot of memory issues; he would get lost and various things would go on, but the point is, physically, when we age, one of the first things that goes is the memory. At my age there's a whole list of things that have left, and have left no forwarding address, so to speak. That's one of the first things that goes—things start getting a little fuzzy, we can't remember names, where we are, what planet we're on—on and on it goes. Just think about that then, what God can do for us when He gives us that power and we're changed to spirit beings. We're going to have perfect recall, perfect retention. Imagine that—we're going to know every word of the Bible, where it's at, how to apply it—we're going to have all of that at hand. We're going to know exactly what to do. We're going to have that.

Just think about no pain, no physical aches, nothing to slow us down. I look at the kids now and some of the kids running around and I really envy that. We were kidding each other this morning, my wife and I were getting dressed, and she said, someday we're going to have to help each other get dressed. The point is there's going to be a phenomenal difference in what we're able to do from what we're able to do today when we're resurrected, when we're miraculously transformed. I don't know about you but you can hardly imagine that—you just can't. Right now we're just a fraction of what we can be and what we're going to be. It's important for us to understand that about our calling—we're going to be changed and it's going to be overwhelming what God is going to be able to do with us. We're going to take these fragile human beings and make spirit beings out of them. God wants us to get that; that should be pretty clear to us.

One thing He needs to know, and we're coming to the third area—the final area—God needs to know something about us. He needs to know what's in our hearts, what's in our minds, and He needs to know it's going to stay there. We won't cross that finish line if that's not there. What does God need to know about us now? The third area we're going to look at is the answer to that question. Mark 1:14—this is very familiar to us.

Mark 1:14 *Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God [there's the context],*
15) *and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."* (NKJV)

You can look this up in your own Bible but every time Christ mentions the Kingdom of God, He always talks about repentance and belief. That's always there if you look and see that in the context. What does repentance really mean? God brought us all to repentance from what we were before, from where we started. Repentance just means that God helps us to see ourselves. If we continue repenting, through these days until we're changed or until we die, repentance also means we have a willingness to look within ourselves. That's what that means, with God's continued help, and we do that prayerfully all the time; we see where we need to change, and if we see it, we change it. Sometimes it's a gradual process that takes place over time. At least we see where we need to change. Where do we get that information? Where do we get the instruction about changing? We get it out of God's word over a lifetime, don't we—we absorb it. Let's turn to Matthew 19; all we have to do is read God's word to find the answers. Matthew 19:16-19, we know the context here is the rich young man coming to Christ, asking Him a question.

Matthew 19:16 *Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"* (NKJV)

That's getting down to what we are talking about—what do we need to do to have eternal life? What do we need to do to obtain that transformation?

17) *So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.* (NKJV)

He always pointed to the Father, the originator of the commandments, and He is going to recite them to this young man in a second.

17 continued) ... *But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.*" (NKJV)

That brings us to the one thing that is important to God. If we want to enter into life we have to obey God, which starts with keeping the commandments. Why is that so important? Verse 18, can you earn salvation? The Pharisees thought that and this doesn't mean that. We have to do what God says, that's what this means.

18) *He said to Him ...* (NKJV)

You can see the mentality of this young man, that he was a product of the Pharisaical society.

18 continued) ... *“Which ones?”* (NKJV)

He wanted to weigh it out; he wanted to put some kind of measurement on it. What can I get away with? Can I get away with up to 50 percent obedience to God, can I get away with just 80 percent, can I go along and do whatever I want to do? Look what Jesus said, no equivocation whatsoever.

18 continued) ... *Jesus said, “‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’*

19) ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (NKJV)

Notice how He mixed those up and even gave some of them out of order, because it doesn't matter when we apply them, it's how we apply them; that's what matters to God. Let's read something else He said in Matthew 13—again, this is the parable of the sower, very familiar. I'll be using the NLT for this. Verses 18-23.

Matthew 13:18 *“Now listen to the explanation of the parable about the farmer planting seeds:*

19) The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message about the Kingdom and don't understand it. [That's the world as a whole.] Then the evil one comes and snatches away the seed that was planted in their hearts.

20) The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. (NLT)

We know there are several categories He's talking about here. The first ones don't get it—that's the majority of human beings today. No matter how and where they hear it, they just don't get; they never get it. In the second example given, He's talking about another category; they hear it, they accept it, but they don't do anything with it. Maybe that explains a lot of the experiences that we have seen in the church. People have gotten it and accepted it, but, as it goes on in verse 21,

21) ... since they don't have deep roots, they don't last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God's word. (NLT)

We all face those issue in our lives; we've faced plenty because of our beliefs. Many come from home, or from within a marriage or something like that, jobs over the Sabbath day—we have faced that one many, many times—many things like that.

22) The seed that fell among the thorns represents those who hear God's word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the lure of wealth, so no fruit is produced.

23) *The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God's word [really and truly get it] and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!" (NLT)*

So spiritual growth takes place. God wants to see something in our life. You notice that in all cases, they heard it. Some accepted it and some did not. So the teaching in and of itself does not produce fruit in a person's life. Just knowing it doesn't produce anything. A lot of people have come to the knowledge of God's ways but at some point, the worries, the problems, the difficulties, the temptations in life—they just decide this isn't the way they want to continue to live. The point I'm trying to make is, hearing and understanding and applying God's word, it's so important that the teaching of all this—all the teaching of this is going to be paramount in the Millennium. You're probably going to hear the prophet Isaiah many times during the Feast, but let's go to Isaiah, chapter 2, verses 2-4, from the New King James—a famous scripture in Isaiah 2. Here's what's going to happen.

Isaiah 2:2 *Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. (NKJV)*

We know that means it's going to be over all nations—it's going to be worldwide.

3) *Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. (NKJV)*

That's a job description, if you want to look at it that way. Those are some of the responsibilities we'll have in God's Kingdom. The whole world will go up and learn; they'll learn from us. They're going to be taught what?—the laws, the scriptures, everything out of this Book—it all means the same thing when you talk about the law. What do we need to be in God's Kingdom? Do you need to be a lawyer, a judge, an administrator, a V.P.? Every time I hear the word V.P.—I worked for a corporation, retired from a corporation, a nuclear power plant—they had five V.P.'s. You talk about insulation for the C.E.O. You don't need to be somebody who knows all that but you need to know what this Book says and how to apply what it says. That's what our job is going to be.

That doesn't mean we have to know it all perfectly right now but our job is going to be as He has described it, because that is what God is looking for. He's looking and asking, who are the people that believe this Book and really apply what it says? Who are they? God is primarily interested in that—in us knowing His word and living it. He doesn't care who we are, where we come from in our lives, what our station might be; if we believe what God's word says, what He tells us and we apply it, then we're building that foundation God is going to need for those future administrators, the ones who cross that finish line.

We have to believe God's word, it has to be a way of life for us. It has to be something dear to us. It's something you can sit down and discuss with people. At some point in the future, when you think about some of the technicalities that are going to have to be taken care of, God can give the gift of languages, we could probably speak all the languages unless God institutes a new language, which prophecy tells us He is going to do. We could have the gift of tongues. We would have that and there would be a purpose to it; it wouldn't be just a means for us to show off or whatever. I know people who can speak several languages and it is impressive when we do that, but it's not for us, it's so we can teach people what is in this Book—that's what it's going to be for.

The Pharisees thought you could earn your way into God's good graces—into His Kingdom, whatever they thought that meant—by strict adherence to all the rules they could come up with. They thought it was a rule-based thing; if I do this, this, this and that—there were hundreds of things just to do with the Sabbath. Our qualifications are going to be, have you done what this Book says; those are going to be the qualifications. Let's continue in Isaiah 2, verse 4.

4) He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; (NKJV)

How is He going to rebuke people? You're not doing what this Book says, that's how He's going to rebuke people.

4 continued) ... They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. (NKJV)

I always liked that word, *learn*. It's what they learn that's going to change the world, when you think about it, in that context. It's just reading in the Book, it's not just study time—anybody can do that—but how you believe it and how you live it, that shows how serious you are about obeying God. Let's go over to Revelation 3; we're going to go down and read verses 21 and 22. We know He just finished with His admonition to the churches. You can approach this in different ways and you get the same meaning out of it in different ways.

Revelation 3:21 *To him who overcomes ... (NKJV)*

Overcomes what? Overcomes those things that are contrary to what God says, that's what it's talking about.

21 continued) ... I will grant to sit with Me on My throne ... (NKJV)

It doesn't get any clearer than what it says right here. You do what I tell you to do and you can rule in My government; you can have a part in that. It has nothing to do with who we are, what our station is in life—any of that—it's what we do here that will tell God what we're going to do there. It's in our heart. Continuing in the last part of verse 21.

21 continued) ... *as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.*
(NKJV)

We know that was after He was resurrected. He's giving this message to John to give to us; to pass that along to us.

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

We know those who understand that—not the people who don't understand it. What's the message to the churches? The message is pretty simple. What I'm looking for is one thing: Will you do what I say in My Book—will you do that? Will you do what I tell you to do? That's what He's looking for. If you will, you can have part in that government. We can be in that family that God sets up. Christ is the only one who has been transformed in that Kingdom now—He's at the right hand of God. God is going to give that kind of power, but He has to know one thing about us; will we do what He tells us to do? He has to know that about us. We will do that because it's in our heart and we'll always do it, no matter what we lose in our life. We'll trust God just like those individuals did back there in Daniel—those four individuals, those four Jewish captives. They did what God told them to do and they suffered for it but they have a reward, don't they? That reward is beyond anything we can comprehend with our limited human mind.

We might be thinking, I don't really know the Bible that well; I'm not sure I could teach it, but God is going to give us the immense ability to do that. All He has to do is teach us—however He's going to do that, and we'll have perfect understanding. No, we won't be robots. We'll be spirit beings with a huge reservoir of a mind that God the Father and Christ are going to pump into our minds—it's going to be incredible. There's such an enormous amount of knowledge out there, we don't have a clue about it right now, but we'll hear it one time and we'll remember—won't that be something? He'll fill in all those gaps in our understanding and ability. Remember, time won't mean anything; we don't know how long it will take for us. You all will probably do it really quickly, I think I'll need a little more time, due to my age ((laughs)).

We don't need to know anything about running this or that—that's not really going to be important. It's going to come to the point where Christ is going to say, listen, here's what I want you to do. And we'll respond, and say, yes, Lord, I want to do it exactly as you tell me to do it. That's what He wants. He'll give us everything we need; He'll give us the ability, the power, the comprehension.

When you think about it, that's the easy part for God. He's given us these little minds right now but then He's going to give us great minds. We will remember everything, we'll do what He tells us to do. Matthew 7:21—God promises to do all that if we listen and if we do what He says; He's promised all that.

Matthew 7:21 *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. (NKJV)*

There it is in plain language—it doesn’t get any clearer than that. Will you do what I say, will you trust Me and faithfully follow Me? That’s what it says.

22) *Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’*
23) *And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; [I don’t recognize a thing I told you to do, in your life—I don’t recognize it, I don’t see it there] depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’ (NKJV)*

If you can’t follow the rules, if you can’t do what God says, He says, I don’t know you and you won’t be there. So it comes down to that very simple thing: He who does the will of My Father in heaven. Are we perfect in that now? No. I know I’m not. But what God is looking for is, are we doing what we do know to do, and as we learn more things to do, are we applying them? We make tons of mistakes now. We don’t remember everything, we don’t have full comprehension whenever we read, study, or hear a sermon or a Bible study; most of the time, as I’m sure is the case with me, we learn lessons the hard way. Sometimes we say, oops, I didn’t quite get that the first time. We had an elder who had a famous saying about needing to do a “do-over” and his do-over happened every day. That’s kind of the state we’re in.

Summing up these three areas we covered, number one was looking at a system that’s going to be replaced—the end-time Babylonian system. The second was our part in that. We’re going to rule and judge and probably have many, many more responsibilities; we don’t really have a clue now what those will be. We looked at what God wants to see now; are we doing what God says to do? If we get this whole picture, we can see a finish line because it’s clear.

So we can’t really say, I don’t see how God can use me in His Kingdom, because the finish line is the same for every one of us—for every one of us, it’s the same. He can use anyone who does the will of My Father in heaven—that’s what Christ said, those are His words. That should give us a clear picture of that finish line, of what we should be doing. We can kind of see what our jobs and responsibilities are going to be. We can see whenever this end-time system comes to be, and we know it’s going to come to an end, no matter what might happen to us in the meantime. We’ll just say we’re going to trust God and do what He says. We don’t know if any of us are going to lose our lives, or exactly what will happen—we just don’t know—but we’ll want to cross that finish line and be part of God’s Kingdom. Then, we’ll spend eternity with God the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ, doing what They want us to do.