

# Preparing for the Gathering Storms

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Traditionally this day, we talk about humanity having their chance, and I take great joy in talking about that, but today's message is going to be a bit different, and the reason is I believe at this Feast we are at a very pivotal time in God's Church—a critical juncture. In these last days, God has made the decision to reveal more and more about Himself and His Son, Jesus Christ, and He is offering that revelation to those who want to know and who are willing to study in order to know. Then God watches to see who really longs to know more about Him, know more about Jesus Christ, because He wants to know what's in our heart. As a result of God revealing more of Himself (this is my opinion but based on some facts) I believe there is a coming upset and a coming set of divisions within God's Church, between those who want to put God first and those who want to hold on to the status quo, or who want to stay in their comfort zone. That division I believe is going to come.

Let's ask—why would people be divided about wanting to know about God? The first is, Satan hates the truth. Satan wants to get God's people to worship anything but God—the Catholic Church worships apostles and Mary and the list goes on—he has interjected into the minds of humans the desire to worship anything other than the true God because he does not want us to do that. If an individual or group is off track, Satan already has them. But if an individual or group has the truth, then Satan is going to come after that group or come after those individuals with a vengeance because he hates the truth, and he hates those who have the truth and who seek the truth and who want the truth. That fact is prophesied in the New Testament—the fact that there will be divisions, because people say, why can't we all get together? People are waiting for the day for the entire Church to somehow miraculously come together. Well, that's not what Paul prophesied. Let's go to 1 Corinthians 11:19 because the answer lies here. We're going to read the first part of the verse and then stop and analyze it. Notice what Paul says; it's a pretty direct statement.

**1 Corinthians 11:19** *For there must be also heresies among you ...* (KJV)

He doesn't say there could be or there might be, or maybe it will happen, he says *there must be*. The New International version says, *no doubt there have to be differences among you*. The New King James says, *for there must also be factions among you*. The Greek word for "heresies" in the King James or "differences" or "factions" in the other translations is Strong's #139, and it's the Greek word *haireisis*; it means two things: disunion, and the other interesting definition is, it means a choice. Disunion or a choice. So we have to ask the question, why would Paul make this statement—why must there be disunions in the Church and choices to be made in the Church? Well, let's keep going. Let's start over; 1 Corinthians 11:19.

19) *For there must be also heresies [disunions, choices] among you, [why?—he says so right here] that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.* (KJV)

Okay, there are divisions, heresies, choices to be made, because there are those who are not approved among you, and there are those who are approved among you, and Paul is saying you need to know the difference. It's interesting the Greek word for "approved" is Strong's #1384; you can check it, it's the Greek word *dokimos*. If we lived at the time when this was written, this word was commonly used to refer to coinage. If you had a coin that was *dokimos* it meant that it was of the right purity and the right weight. So if you had a *dokimos* coin you had a legitimate coin—it could be used for trade. A coin that was *dokimos* was real and legitimate and was not a fake, so keep that in mind. You see, God causes or allows divisions to come and choices must be made because He wants to bring the light, to light, where the truth is being taught and accepted, where truth seekers can be found and associate together, and He wants to be able to identify those who are approved or those who are legitimate.

So Paul is saying, don't be surprised, divisions have to occur, they must occur so that those who are approved can be made apparent. I firmly believe that over the next year there are coming more divisions in God's Church, not less; more upset and more turmoil. I base that on facts already extant and things going on under the water, so to speak. Winston Churchill wrote a very profound book looking back over his time as Prime Minister of England; it was called The Gathering Storm. In that book, he saw the rise and threat of Hitler back in the early '30s and he warned the government for years—you have to beware of this man because he is going to attack us as soon as he has the means to do so. Typical of many warnings, it fell on deaf ears. The politicians didn't want to hear it, they didn't want to deal with it, and they just closed their ears. As a result of not heeding Churchill's warnings, when Hitler invaded Poland in 1939, Great Britain was woefully unprepared for war. They had years to prepare—five, six, seven, eight years they could have prepared. They lost all of that time, and then all of a sudden war was dropped in their lap, and as a result they paid a very heavy price in lives, in resources, in time—a heavy price.

Similarly, looking to the Church today, looking to us, we don't want to be in the same position spiritually that England was physically—we don't want that. Let's go to 2 Corinthians 10:3. I'm going to read this out of the New American Standard Bible, and my jaw dropped when I read a portion of this that we're going to come to. Very familiar scripture by the way.

**2 Corinthians 10:3** *For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh ...* (NASB)

Our fight isn't a fleshly fight.

4) *for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.*

5) [Notice this] *We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against [what?] the knowledge of God ... (NASB)*

Think about that. Paul is saying, we're destroying these speculations that go against the knowledge of God. We're destroying any lofty thing that comes against the true knowledge of the true God, and there has always been, and there exists today, an effort to limit God in the minds of people, diminish God in the minds of people, and it's going against everything God is presently doing and wants to do in the minds of His people. That is happening right now as we speak. The point is we need to prepare spiritually for these coming spiritual storms, and we have to learn the lesson of World War II and Great Britain because they did not prepare physically for the storm that came upon them.

After we leave today, there are uncertain times ahead in the Church. We can't predict exactly what is going to happen but we are heading into a long, dark winter, as we know, and there are forces afoot—satanic forces afoot—that want to destroy God's people, want to destroy the knowledge of God, want to destroy the elevation and worship and admiration of God—that's a simple fact. So the thought occurred to me that since we have troubled times on the horizon, maybe today we could make an exception and address this subject by asking a few questions, and this is still by way of introduction.

What does God want us to be doing today to prepare for these coming spiritual storms? What does God want us to do? Obviously England had to manufacture arms and airplanes, and train troops and factory workers—it was obvious what they had to do—but what does God want us to do, because we don't want to have to pay a penalty like Great Britain did. They had years of warning and they ignored Churchill. The philosopher and author George Santayana (1863–1952) said—and you're probably familiar with this—"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." We want to learn from the past, and we learn by looking back at this example from World War II, that if you ignore problems and dismiss problems and close the book on problems, they're not going to go away; they just get worse and you're less prepared down the road. So how we can prepare to weather the storms that lie ahead? So the title of the sermon is:

### Preparing for the Gathering Storms

We're going to look at that in the time we have today. The first, always the key, is:

#### **1. We must grow in the knowledge of God and Christ.**

That's not an option to God's people. God expects us to grow in knowing Him better, knowing Christ better, knowing Their relationship, knowing Their activities, knowing what

They've done—God expects us to study it and learn it and know it. That was true in the Old Testament. Let's go to Jeremiah 9:23; another speaker read the same scripture—it's amazing how many times during this Feast the same scriptures get read over and over. Back in the old days, as a young elder, you'd get read the riot act if you used somebody else's scriptures. But I learned a lesson long ago when I did that giving a sermonette, from the pastor; he said, don't worry about it, it just means that God wants it repeated—God has a point He want to make.

**Jeremiah 9:23** *Thus saith the LORD [all caps, God Almighty, the Most High God], Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, [that's vanity] neither let the mighty man glory in his might [that's also vanity], let not the rich man glory in his riches: [pride]*

24) *But let him that glorieth glory in this, [what should we glory in?] that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD [the Most High God] which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: [notice this though] for in these things I delight ... (KJV)*

We want to delight God, we want to make God happy with us. I think we'd all want to make God pleased with us, wouldn't we? God is saying, I delight in this if you'll just do it. Let's go to Hosea 6:6. God applies it to the sacrificial system in existence in that day.

**Hosea 6:6** *For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; (KJV)*

He said, I would rather you show mercy to your fellow man than go offer a sacrifice.

6 continued) *... and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. (KJV)*

Burnt offerings were such a focal point of the nation of Israel, and God is saying, you can take those and set them aside, because what I desire more than that is that you come to know Me. We know Israel didn't know God; they thought they did but they didn't know who He was. God delights in our knowing Him.

The knowledge of God is more important than all the sacrifices that have ever been made—we're told here—so I scratch my head and say, well, isn't it time we believe that? Isn't it time we act on that? Isn't it time we make that the main focus when we wake up every day—this day I want to get to know God and Christ better than I knew Them yesterday. It's equally true in the New Testament. Let's go to John 17:3. I think this has been mentioned four or five times. I know I did in my first sermon—it's kind of our trumpet call, if you want to call it that. Christ is speaking, and I'm going to read this out of the New Living Translation because I think it adds a little bit to it.

**John 17:3** *And this is the way to have eternal life ... (NLT)*

Neon lights go on, flashing lights go on—this is the way to have eternal life, and then he tells us what it is:

3 continued) ... *to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth.* (NLT)

We want eternal life? Well, it's right here, no mystery about it. We want to walk down the road to eternal life? Okay, real simple: Get to know God, get to know Jesus Christ, study them, and then emulate them. Verse 4 out of the King James.

4) [Christ says] *I have glorified thee on the earth:* (KJV)

Notice what Christ's focus was: I have glorified You, My Father. I didn't glorify Myself, didn't glorify an institution, didn't glorify Israel—I glorified You ...

4 continued) ... *I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.* (KJV)

So if Christ was on the earth to glorify His Father, then the logical question for us is, shouldn't we be doing the same thing? Shouldn't our purpose, our goal be to glorify God while we are alive and taking breath and walking this earth? That should be our purpose. It should be the purpose of the Church, it should be the purpose of the ministry, it should be the purpose of the brethren. To glorify God while on this earth, while we have the time. Now let's go to 2 Peter 3:15. This glorifying of God, growing in the knowledge of God and Christ is a theme throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament. Here's a second scripture. Peter gives a bit of a warning here too.

**2 Peter 3:15** *And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you;*

16) *As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, [notice what happens] which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest [twist], as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.* (KJV)

We see here, back then and it applies to us today, there are people who twist and distort scripture to serve their own ends—not God's ends, not God's will, but their own ends.

17) *Ye therefore, [because of this, taking recognition of this] beloved, seeing ye know these things before, [he says, I'm telling you in advance, they're going to twist and wrest the scriptures to get you off track] beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.* (KJV)

Then verse 18, comes the famous scripture.

18) *But grow [not plateau, grow] in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.* (KJV)

So in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, they're consistent. All I'm saying is, if we love God with all our heart, which we all know we should be doing, shouldn't we want to know Him better? How can you not want to do that? How can you not want to do that? The point is, God is serious about our coming to know Him better. This isn't an option, this isn't kind of a suggestion, He is serious about it. To have a greater knowledge of Him and His Son, Jesus Christ. Why is that? So we can brag about our knowledge? So we can elevate the self and say, I know this and you don't know that? (We've seen that in the Church for years.) Knowledge, if it's for the wrong purpose, can lead one astray and cause vanity and all of that. Why does God want us to have a greater knowledge of Him, particularly in these end days? It seems obvious—so we can worship Him more fully.

We can know Him more fully and therefore worship Him more fully, and we can obey Him and Jesus Christ more fully because we know Them better. We know what They've done, we know what Their desire is, we know what Their character and nature are, we know by learning from history what not to do. So you see the purpose of the knowledge is to worship God, honor God, elevate God more fully. So that when we read the Bible or we sing here today, we can know who we're talking to. We can know who is being referenced. I went for decades in the Church and read some of these: Living God, Most High God—all of those terms—and it was kind of all mushed together; I didn't really think about it. Shame on me, I'm embarrassed—I kick myself daily because of that. So when we read and when we sing, we can know who is being referenced. When we pray, we can know who we're talking to more fully. It's not some fuzzy image, it's not somebody far off—we know who we're talking to.

Coming to know God and Christ better is a never-ending quest. We will never have that full knowledge. The only human being that has ever walked this earth that had the full knowledge of God and Christ was Jesus Christ Himself. Someday we will, but not in this life, but the quest, the search, the yearning, the longing, is what God wants.

Point number two—preparing ourselves for what lies ahead, and I'm summarizing a lot of what has already been said:

## **2. We have to put God first in our lives.**

I know this is a general platitude. Yes, you've got to put God first in your life, and then off to other subjects or something. But what does it mean to put God first in our lives—what does it really mean? It gets back to the first commandment—what does that say? When you study it and all of its ramifications it means *put nothing before God Almighty*. Nothing. Stuff, ourselves, mates, children, money—put nothing before God Almighty. Exodus 20:3, we know that. Let's see what Christ said about the subject in Matthew 22:35. I'll read this out of the New King James. This is where the lawyer came to Christ and wanted to trip Him up, so we're breaking into that story.

**Matthew 22:35** *Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying,*

36) *“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?”*

37) *Jesus said to him, “ ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul [in both the New King James and the King James “soul” means your life, with everything you have], and with all your mind.’ (NKJV)*

If we love God with all our being, guess what we’re going to do—we’re going to put Him first. If we love Him with all our being we will put Him first in our lives, no matter what.

38) *This is the first and great commandment.*

39) *And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ (NKJV)*

There are two important facts we should note in what we just read. The first is, the first commandment does not say that we should love God as much as we love ourselves—it doesn’t say that. It says we have to love God *more* than we love ourselves. The second point—Mark [Mickelson] pointed this out in his sermon—the second commandment does not precede the first, it comes second; it is the second commandment. So the obvious meaning of that is that we can’t love our neighbor if we don’t love God first, otherwise it becomes let’s just do good works, and sit in a circle, and hold hands, and sing “Kumbaya” and all of that, but you don’t get very far with that.

The only way we can love our neighbor is if we understand what loving God is, and if we understand what God is all about then we know what God wants as far as loving our neighbor—esteeming others better than ourselves. Having others in mind rather than our mind on ourself all the time. Let’s go back to Matthew 4 and read verse 10. Again, Christ telling us that we have to put God first. Christ is the Son and He says, I want you to put God first, I don’t want you to Me first—I want you to put God first.

**Matthew 4:10** *Then saith Jesus unto him, [unto Satan] Get thee hence [get you out of here], Satan: for it is written, [he’s quoting 1 Samuel 7:3] Thou shalt worship the LORD thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. (KJV)*

That’s about as simple as it gets—how can you complicate that? Worship God with all that you have and serve Him with all you have. Do what He wants, make Him pleased. The Bible says, make His face to shine on you. That should be our goal. What does want God me to do? Christ set the example. He said, I came here to do My Father’s will, so maybe I should look and see what Christ did while He walked the earth and emulate that—Christ was pleasing His Father, therefore I’m going to please God the Father, God’s face will shine up on Me, and He’s going to be happy with me as His kid. There’s nothing greater than pleasing your Dad. Spiritually pleasing your Dad, there is nothing greater than that. Hand in hand with putting God first is we have to develop a closer relationship with Him.

As times become more troubled and more perilous, we're going to need to be a lot closer to God than we are right now. We are going to need that closeness to successfully endure the storms that are coming our way. We have to be close to Him because if we're not, we're going to get separated, then we're off on our own and God help us if we're off on our own. Let's go to Psalm 73:28. This was written by Asaph—he was a man of God. The pages are turning slowly today; you can tell we're at the end of the Feast. [[laughs]]

**Psalm 73:28** *But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the LORD God [YHVH], that I may declare all thy works. (KJV)*

So you see, coming down the road, God is going to test us to see what we're made of. How badly do we want His Kingdom? How badly do we want to get to know Him? How badly do we want to be like Him and His Son, Jesus Christ? How bad do we want it? Will we fade away with just a little bit of pressure? If we want it badly, we will hang in there. A closer relationship with God gives us the strength to endure the gathering storms that are coming our way. Let's go to Romans 12:12. This is an interesting scripture because it has a word that we don't use commonly in the English. Notice what we're told here.

**Romans 12:12** *Rejoicing in hope [yes we should rejoice in hope, absolutely]; patient in tribulation; (KJV)*

That was mentioned yesterday—we want God to do what we want God to do, when we want it to happen, and often God says, no, that's not My purpose, so we have to be patient in tribulation. Knowing this, look at this next phrase.

12 continued) ... *continuing instant in prayer; (KJV)*

The use of the word “instant” doesn't make a lot of sense to us in the English. In the Greek, it was generally applied to a slave or a servant—this Greek word. It was referring to what a slave did or what a servant did in serving or attending to his master. It's Strong's #4342; let me read what Strong's says: “To be constantly diligent, to adhere closely to, as a servant.” If that master was eating, the servant was right there; if the master wanted a drink of wine, the servant was right there to get it; if the master wanted seconds, the servant was right there to get it. He was attentive, he was looking, he was right beside his master, ready to do his master's bidding—that's what this word means. Going on: “To attend continually upon or wait on continually.”

So yes, we are instant in prayer because that means we are paying attention to God, we're walking right beside Him, we're following His lead, and as with the slave or the servant, all the master had to say is, I want you to do this and the servant did it. This is trying to tell us that this should be our attitude: instant in prayer, meaning instant communication with God, knowing His will. The more we study about God and the example of Jesus Christ then instinctively we will begin to know God's will—we don't



have to think about it, we just act because we have God's Holy spirit in us and we're attuned to God.

We must be with God every minute of every day, and I'm ashamed to say, for the first thirty or forty years I came in the Church, I tried to do too much on my own—too much with my own weak abilities or the intelligence I had—I would strike out on my own, and you know when you're young you feel like, yeah I can do that. When you're older you realize, no, I can't do that anymore; my brain doesn't work quite as fast as it did before, and so the good thing about getting older is you rely more on God because you can't rely on yourself.

We have to be with God, every minute of every day, and the people in their twenties, thirties, forties and fifties need to think about that. When you're in your sixties, seventies, eighties and nineties, it's right in your face, that you can't do it by yourself. We have to be with God every minute of every day. If we don't involve God in everything we do, we will miserably fail—embarrassingly fail, in some situations. In the Church (I can't speak for other churches), in the Pacific Church of God, what we want to do is do God's will, and let us get out of the way, and not be a stumbling block to what God wants because of our attitude or what we think ought to be done, and let God take us by the hand as a little kid. There's a minefield ahead of us, coming—all kinds of traps, all kinds of explosions—so let God take us by the hand and lead us through the minefield, because we don't know the way ourselves; let Him do it. That's why we need to be with God, every minute of every day, and we have to put Him first. If we put Him first, then He will be with us and we will be right beside Him.

### **3. We must develop absolute trust in God.**

Absolute trust in God. Being near to God and putting your trust in God go hand in hand. If you're near to God and you look to God and you put Him first and you want to obey Him first, then you're going to trust Him. In a sermon it was said with one question—God was testing the Israelites, and the speaker brought out the fact that God was asking, will you trust in Me in or not? Are you going to do it or not? God wants that from us. Another speaker mentioned yesterday that when you go through what they as a family went through, at some point you just give up and say, God, this is in Your hands, I have no control over this. You have all power so You take it on and I'm just going to follow your lead. We're going to be tested before this is all over with, we are going to be tested whether or not we will trust God with our lives, not just saying the words, but with our lives. Let's go to Romans 2:11. Here's a fact.

**Romans 2:11** *For there is no respect of persons with God.* (KJV)

God doesn't give some people an easy path to the Kingdom and other people have a life full of trials. We all have to go through what God knows we need to go through.

12) *For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish [the Greek means to be destroyed, they will be destroyed without the law, apart from the law] without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;* (KJV)

Verse 13 I'm going to read out of the NIV.

13) *For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's eyes, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.* (NIV)

One of the most accomplished men in the history of mankind—not talking about in the Church, but in the world—was Leonardo da Vinci. What a talent and look what he did. He said this, “I have been impressed with the urgency of doing.” Think about that, maybe we should take a hint from that. “I have been impressed with the urgency of doing. Knowing is not enough, we must apply”—meaning apply the knowledge in our lives. “Being willing is not enough, we must do.” When the rubber meets the road, we must do. We must apply it. We must exercise it in our lives—exercising God's Spirit. How are we going to respond to the testing of our trust in God? Rest assured, God is going to test us. That is going to happen. How much do we trust Him? How will we respond?

It's my observation that it is easy to lose faith when God does not meet our expectations. In other words, when God doesn't do what we want Him to do, then it's easy to lose faith. We lose faith when God does not meet our expectations. It's easy to love God when everything's going okay: rainbow is out, sun is shining, we feel good, no problems—it's easy to praise God when that situation occurs because God is meeting all our expectations. He's doing what we want Him to do. What happens when God does not meet our expectations? He does not answer our prayers in the way we would like Him to; He answers them in a different way. Maybe we haven't thought about the way He answered but it isn't what we expected. If that occurs and when it occurs, are we going to lose faith? Are we going to blame God? That was mentioned—people get angry with God. I know a guy in Boston who had a house fire; it burned his house down and he left the Church because He was mad with God. How can you let that happen? Or as was the case with another family, how can you let my son go through this? Will we lose faith and blame God and distance ourselves from God when He doesn't meet our expectations or will we just humble ourselves and say, God, Your will be done. I am here to do Your will because You know better than I do.

There's a promise in Romans 8:28 that all is going to work out for the best if I will just get out of Your way, humble myself and let You do what You will do. We have to keep that in mind. Notice Moses' response. This was mentioned in a sermon, Exodus 14:9. They were caught between the mountains and the sea in a V and Israel was piling into this V and they had nowhere to go. It was like a triangle—there were the mountains on one side, the Red Sea on the other side and on the third side, the open side of the V, guess who was coming at them?

**Exodus 14:9** *But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pihahiroth, before Baalzephon.*

10) *And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. (KJV)*

Cried out and said, God, we trust you, we're not worried at all, we know you're going to take care of these guys, we're just going to hide and watch and let it happen. No. Verse 11.

11) *And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt?*

12) *Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness. (KJV)*

At this juncture, God was not meeting their expectations and they fell apart. Verse 13, God had a different plan; He was going to do it a different way.

13) *And Moses said unto the people [we should take note of this and apply it to ourselves], Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, (KJV)*

All you have to do is watch, you don't have to do a thing; I will take care of it.

13 continued) *... which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever.*

14) *The LORD [God Almighty] shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace. (KJV)*

The lesson is, wait on God. Let God do what He will do and watch. David—notice David's response to testing of faith. Psalm 63:1—this is the psalm of David when he was in the wilderness and guess what he was doing when the psalm was written—he was running for his life. Out in the desert. He had the claim to royalty, the possessions, the stuff, and now he is reduced to running for his life—notice his attitude.

**Psalm 63:1** *O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: [I'm not mad at you, I'm not blaming you] my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is;*

2) *To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.*

3) *Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. (KJV)*

Even in trouble, even when running for his life.

4) *Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name.* (KJV)

Aggrandizing God, honoring God.

5) *My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips* [in the midst of a trial]:

6) *When I remember thee upon my bed*, [shows you how close he was to God, he thought about God all the time] *and meditate on thee in the night watches* [throughout the night he would wake up and meditate on God].

7) *Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.* (KJV)

[He is using] an analogy of a mother hen or a mother bird dropping the wings down and the little chick [himself] coming under the shadow of those wings.

8) *My soul followeth hard after thee:* (KJV)

I looked up the word “hard”—I’ve never looked it up before and in the Hebrew it means “to catch by pursuit”. He said, I will follow hard after you. I’m going to be with you because I’m going to pursue you. I’m not going to wait for You to come to me, I’m going to go to You, David says.

8 continued) ... *thy right hand upholdeth me.*

9) *But those that seek my soul, to destroy it, shall go into the lower parts of the earth* [this is their reward].

10) *They shall fall by the sword: they shall be a portion for foxes.*

11) *But the king* [referring to himself] *shall rejoice in God; every one that sweareth by him shall glory: but the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped.* (KJV)

That was talked about, we’ve heard it before—those who speak lies about God, they’re going to have to stand before God, I believe completely naked, and God’s going to say, you said this; can you tell Me why you said that and what you meant by that?

Notice how close though David was to God. He was trusting in God for deliverance while he was running for his life. We’re going to be put to the test so God will know, as He did with Abraham, as the knife was coming down—Abraham in his mind had already killed his son—he had already obeyed in his mind, because the knife wouldn’t have come down if he hadn’t made that decision. We’re going to be put to the test so God will know and will be able to see whether we will unconditionally trust Him. Without condition—unconditionally trust Him to the point of our own life.

The fourth point, and the last point:

#### 4. We must realize what lies ahead is serious business.

Sometimes we think life is going to go on, everything is going to be as it was before, but I believe what lies ahead is very, very serious. The trouble that lies ahead will show God how badly we want to be like Him, how badly we will seek Him, how much we will aggrandize Him and put Him first. Let's go to Matthew 7:12. This is how far it goes. I'll read this out of the New King James. Christ is giving us a principle here—the golden rule as it's called today.

**Matthew 7:12** *Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*

13) *“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.*

14) *Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (NKJV)*

That, in and of itself, is a scary thought: There are few who find it.

15) *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.*

16) *You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?*

17) *Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.*  
[Pretty simple.]

18) *A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.*

19) *Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (NKJV)*

We don't have to have a stretch to understand what that means.

20) *Therefore by their fruits you will know them [repeated now twice].*

21) [Here's the scary thought] *Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven ... (NKJV)*

We need to let that sink in because that is reality. Christ says it. Not everyone that cries out to Him or God is going to be there.

21 continued) *... but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. (NKJV)*

And what is God's will?—we've already read it—to get to know Him better. To understand who He is. To understand who Jesus Christ is, what Their relationship is, what They've done up to this point.

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?'* (KJV)

There were people who did that. If you could translate that into today's terms, people could say, haven't we printed magazines and booklets in Your name? Haven't we gone on television to proclaim your name? Look at the answer in verse 23.

23) *And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you [get out of here, I don't want you near me]; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'* (KJV)

So this tells us that God is really serious about the fruits we produce. Not when someone is watching but what happens in our head, how we think, what our motivation is. Let's go to Matthew 25—if you have a marker you probably want to place it here—we'll begin in verse 1. Go to the parable of the ten virgins just to make a couple of points here. Any time the Bible says the Kingdom of heaven is like ... our antenna should go up and we should pay attention.

**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.* (NKJV)

Notice here, all ten are virgins—not just five—all ten are virgins. That means they are unpolluted, members of God's Church—keep the law, keep the Sabbath, tithe, whatever. But, we're told in verse 2,

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

So there was a distinction between the two groups of five. The Greek word for "wise" is Strong's #5429 and it means *thoughtful, implying a cautious character*. In other words they were careful of their conduct to please God. Thoughtful, careful, wise—is this what God wants me to do, is this action, this thought, pleasing to God? Then the Greek word for "foolish" is Strong's #3474. It's an interesting word; it's the Greek word *moros* (the English word "moron" comes from that), and it means "dull" or "stupid" but it also means "heedless"—not paying attention. We would say, "Going where angels fear to tread." Zohdhiates, in his Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament says, "Used of persons, meaning morally worthless concerning heart and character." Maybe outwardly they appear righteous, or obey superficially, but inside it's a different story.

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, [notice this] they all slumbered and slept.*

6) *"And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming;'* (NKJV)

In verse 7, all those virgins arose, they trimmed their lamps, and as half tried to buy oil and went out to buy—they were belatedly trying to grow in God’s Spirit—Christ came. He shut the door (at the end of verse 10) and afterward there came the foolish virgins saying Lord, Lord, open to us, and Christ said to them, I don’t know you, I don’t recognize you. You’re not like Me, you’re like somebody else.

13) [A warning] *“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming. (NKJV)*

Here we see only half make it. When the Worldwide Church of God blew apart, over half left, never to return, and before this is all over maybe it could be far fewer than fifty percent make it. Let’s go to Luke 14:25; I’m going to read this out of the New Living translation. Prior to baptism we often go to Luke 14 because it deals with counting the cost and it is what someone should consider when they consider baptism.

**Luke 14:25** *A large crowd was following Jesus. He turned around and said to them,*

26) *“If you want to be my disciple, you [notice this] must, [not, it’s a good idea, you might think about it] by comparison, hate everyone else—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life.*

*Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple.*

27) *You cannot be My disciple if you don’t carry your own cross. (NLT)*

That word in the Greek can mean, literally, a pole or a cross used as an instrument of capital punishment, but figuratively it means exposure to death. We have to be willing to expose ourselves to death and show God and Christ that we love Them more than we love ourselves.

28) *“But don’t begin until you count the cost. (NLT)*

Then he goes on to talk about somebody building a building and not counting the cost, and then everybody laughs at him, or a king or a general going to war and not counting the cost, and then suffering a price, paying a penalty. Verse 33.

33) *So no one can become my disciple without giving up everything for Me. (NLT)*

Not most of it, not some of it, everything for Me.

34) *“Salt is good for seasoning. But if it loses its flavor, how do you make it salty again?”*

35) *Flavorless salt is good neither for the soil nor for fertilizer. It is thrown away. Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand!” (NLT)*

We’ve got to bear fruits. Those fruits have to be Godly fruits. God is serious when He tells us that we have to be willing to give up everything—everything—and we must put

Him first in every aspect of our lives, and He warns us that not everybody is going to make the Kingdom of God. That should cause our knees to knock—not everybody is going to make it. Sometimes in the Church we just think that somehow, some way, it's all going to work out so that everybody makes it or almost everybody makes it, and that's not what this says.

Let's start summarizing and wrapping up here. Going forward from here—this is my opinion—I think we all have to have a sense of urgency because I think we have difficult times ahead. God is serious about coming to know Him and His Son more fully than we ever have, He is serious about us putting God first, He is serious about us trusting Him with our lives in every facet of our lives. He is going to watch us over this coming year to see where our focus is. Is it on stuff? Is it on the coming NFL season? Is it on possessions or whatever? Or is it on God, whom we're putting first?

Some people deceive themselves by believing that as long as I try, then God is okay with me; as long as I give it the good ole college try then God's okay. The problem with that is, at the end of the day, there is no try. I remember back in 1980 when the first Star Wars movie came out, Dorothy and I took our son—he was excited about Star Wars so we all decided to go see it together—and it was a great movie, it was exciting and had a lot of visual effects that had never happened on screen before, but in the middle of the movie this Jedi master named Yoda, this little, short, wrinkled guru, said something profound—so profound, I wrote it down. Young Luke was complaining and whining that it was too hard and too tough, and the training was too much and all of that, and little Yoda said, “Try not. Do or do not. There is no try.” Because, when all is said and done, we either do or we don't. Trying makes not a whit of difference.

To go to God and say, God, I tried, but I failed—I tried, my heart was right, I tried, but God said, yeah, but you didn't—you didn't do it. Maybe you wanted to, maybe you would like to, but at the end of the day when the rubber meets the road, you did not do that. God is serious about our doing works of righteousness. God is serious about our knowing Him and coming to be like Him. God is serious about knowing His Son and knowing how His Son behaved on this earth, because remember Christ said, I came to do the will of the Father, I can't do anything by Myself but to follow that example.

God is serious when He says, there's going to come a day when you're going to have to stand before Me and My Son to give account of everything you said, everything you thought and everything you've done. I look back in my life and oh I wish I could undo some things. I wish I could go back and have a do over of all that's in the past. The fact is we can't, obviously, so what's the next best thing?—to show God from this day forward, I would never do that again, and God's going to test us. He will put us in the same situation where we screwed up the time before to see if we're going to do it right this time, then He knows. We can say to Him, God, twenty years ago I really messed this one up, but today, I was in the same position and I hope you're happy with me, because I didn't do what I did before.



Notice these serious truths. Let's go to 1 Peter 4:18—this is a serious scripture that we should consider.

**1 Peter 4:18** *And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?* (KJV)

The Greek word for *scarcely* means “with difficulty” and “with much work”. It is going to be difficult, we're going to have to work hard and we will be scarcely—by the skin of our teeth—saved. There was a book about World War II and the account that we talked about in the beginning; it was called The Narrow Margin and it dealt primarily with the air battle, the Battle of Britain. If you read the book, it shows you how narrowly they won and how close it was—they could have lost so easily. It came down to one day—one day—and they could have lost the whole thing. They would not have had an air force and then Britain would have been open to invasion. Scarcely be saved. Let's go to Luke 19:27; Christ is speaking. This will happen and we need to realize that contrary to what you see in modern Christianity, where all is sweetness and light and love and more love, and all of that, there's going to come a day when this is going to happen:

**Luke 19:27** [Christ Himself is speaking] *But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.* (KJV)

I want to watch them die, because when they're gone, peace is going to break out; when you have all the grumblers and all the complainers and all the disobedient and all the reprobate gone, then peace will break out. Christ is serious—it's life and death ahead of us. While there's still time let's realize that God is serious about getting to know Him and His Son better. God is serious about us establishing a close relationship with Him and with His Son and overcoming our sins. We need to be as serious as God is—that's the key. We need to go forward from here, making it our mission to grow in the knowledge of God and Christ, to put God first in our lives, to trust Him to take care of us in every aspect and to draw closer to God before the Passover gets here. Let's just remember one more scripture, the good news; let's go to 1 John 4:4. This can all happen, it can be accomplished, we can weather the storms. We can endure the storms, get through the storms in front of us because we have this fact to rely on. Notice what John says.

**1 John 4:4** *Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: [how is it possible?] because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. [Satan]* (KJV)

We have the greatest power imaginable on our side if we will yield, submit, learn and grow. As we close this final service, I want to thank you so much for being here and doing your part in making this a wonderful Feast, and pray that God blesses you in the coming year, and I hope we can all be back together a year from now and have safe travels home.