

**Our Ultimate Hope**  
**Feast of Tabernacles**  
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Good morning again, everyone.

I'd like to thank Rachel for that beautiful special music. Having grown up as the son of a musician that used to perform at the Feast all the time and having been married for fourteen years to a lady who was a musician that would perform all the time, I know there is a great deal of work and sacrifice that goes into performing special music that you never see when you just see the performance here. You don't see the weeks of practicing and all the work and stress and toil that goes into that. So, I greatly appreciate it.

I hope everyone is having an enjoyable time here at the Feast. I guess just before I get started today, I'd like to briefly share what has been one of my most special moments at the Feast here this year. John Pollock was mentioning yesterday, before the Blessing of the Little Children, the innocence of a child and how important that is and how God wants us to take on those qualities ourselves. Well, I had a special moment myself this year at the Feast involving the innocence of a child.

A few days ago, Jason McCoy, who gave the sermonette here this morning, asked me if I would stop by their room and anoint his three-year-old daughter Rose because she was feeling a little under the weather. So, after services that day, I stopped by and anointed her and such.

The next day at services I'm standing in the back. I'm back here just having a conversation and Rose spots me. And she's a little three-year-old and she comes running over to me and then she gets right up in front of me and, then, she reaches up and grabs my hands and looks up at me because she's kind of short. And she says, "Hi, James. I feel so much better today!" That just melts your heart.

I was having an on-line chat through Facebook this morning with her grandfather Harold Lee. He's over in Elkhart. As I told him, I said, "That's been my high of the Feast so far was that moment."

Brethren, as members in the Church of God, I'm sure we would probably all agree that just physically speaking in our regular lives year to year typically, I think, the fall holy days and especially the Feast of Tabernacles is really a time that we look forward to every year as kind of the highlight of our year. It's something we plan for. We anticipate. We really look forward to it with a lot of pleasure and really enjoy this time of year as the highlight of our year.

Even more than just physically the enjoyment of all of this, the fall holy days themselves are, as we know, foreshadowing. They're pictures of major events in our future. One of the things we're going to talk about today is, it is very important that we also very much look forward to the fulfillment of all of these events, what they picture, and most importantly the ultimate goal that they're looking to accomplish with all of us in our day to day lives as we go through the trials, the tests, the struggles that we go through in our day to day lives as Christians. It's extremely important that we keep that picture very vivid in our minds to motivate us, because if we don't, very negative things can take place.

By way of introduction, let's start off by turning to Proverbs chapter 29 and we're going to read verse 18. We're going to start off by seeing what can happen to us if we don't keep that picture vivid in our minds.

***Proverbs 29:18.*** *Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but happy is he who keeps the law. (NKJ)*

Now, if you have a New King James translation of the Bible as I do, if you notice next to the word *revelation* there is a little <sup>1</sup>, a little note there. And if you look in the margin, it says, "prophetic vision." So, what it is saying is if we don't have a prophetic vision, a vision of God's plan of salvation and what these holy days picture, and again, most importantly the ultimate outcome that they are intended to accomplish; if we don't keep that in the forefront of our minds, what naturally tends to happen is we cast off restraint. Overcoming is not so important to us anymore. Being diligent about God's law tends to slip in its priorities in our daily lives.

Just to give, you might say, an extreme example of that, a number of you might remember—I want to say in the last month or so—Rick Railston gave a sermon. I want to say the title was something to the effect of Living a God-Centered Life. But in the first part of that sermon, he mentioned the example of Ananias and Sapphira basically in the Book of Acts and how they both really tried to pull a con on Peter. They lied directly to Peter and not only to him and the people, but they were trying to con God in the process as well. God made it very clear He was very unhappy with this and they both wind up dropping dead that very day.

But the point that Rick made in talking about this was he said, "When people get into a mindset of doing something like this," as he put it "God is not even in the picture. God is not in their mind and what they are thinking." They are seeing human beings and corporations and cultures and politics and such, but God is not in the forefront because if God were clearly in their mind, they wouldn't do something like this. They would realize that is futile and ridiculous to try that with God.

That is, you might say, a severe example, but that's what can happen to us if we don't have that picture of God's plan of salvation and what He's trying to accomplish in our lives clearly in our minds to motivate us all the time of how real He is and how special this plan is that He has for us to motivate us in our lives. Because, if we keep

that very diligent in our minds and very real to us, we don't have this reaction of wanting to cast off restraint; we have the opposite reaction.

Let's turn over to 1 John chapter 3 and we'll see what that is. 1 John 3, we're going to start reading in verse 1. It says:

**1 John 3:1.** *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.*

*2) Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. (NKJ)*

And now notice verse 3 especially.

**1 John 3:3.** *And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (NKJ)*

He is saying if we have this hope, if we have this picture in Him, we don't have the reaction of wanting to cast off restraint. We want to purify ourselves. We are willing to be more diligent in obeying God's law. We want to be molded into Christ's image and to become like Him and to develop that character because we want to be a part of this great plan. We want to make it through to the end and receive the great blessings that are promised to us.

If you noticed, the English word here translated as *hope*, just to add a little extra meaning to this, I'd like to share with you the meaning of this actual word. It's the Greek word transliterated into English as *elpis (el-pece')*. It's Strong's #1680 and Strong's Concordance defines it as: to anticipate, usually with pleasure.

Now, as I mentioned in our introduction, just physically in our lives, the Feast of Tabernacles tends to be something we anticipate with pleasure. Isn't it? It's something we look forward to; we make plans around; we get excited about being a part of it and all the things we're going to get to enjoy, the people we're going to get to see, the messages we're going to hear. It's something we get excited about.

What he's [John] saying is we should have a similar reaction looking at God's plan and the ultimate outcome He wants to create in our lives with all of us because if we're excited by that and we anticipate it with pleasure in our daily lives, we don't want to cast off restraint. We want to purify ourselves. We want to be more and more like God. We want to take on His character and we want to overcome our sins because we want to be a part of this great plan because it's exciting for us.

So, what we're going to do today is look at this picture. And my question for you today is: What is our ultimate hope, when we talk about the hope that we can anticipate with pleasure?

If you want a title for this sermon, it is, Our Ultimate Hope.

What is that ultimate picture that we should be looking at in our day to day lives to keep us motivated, to keep us on track and overcoming so that we make it into God's Kingdom? Before we're done today we're going to answer that question of what our ultimate hope is.

But I would like to start off with just looking forward to the time we're picturing here in the Feast of Tabernacles, the time that's the Millennium, the thousand year reign of Jesus Christ. Let's start off first of all just getting a survey look at what this time frame is going to be like. So, let's turn, first of all, to a very common scripture. I'm sure we all associate it with this time of year, Isaiah 2. We'll start reading in verse 1.

***Isaiah 2:1.*** *The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.*

*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.*

*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.*

*4) He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; 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.*  
(NKJ)

We're talking about a thousand-year period where there is no more war. Think about how much suffering and problems and strife, agony that comes about in our world today because of war and all the ugliness that comes with it. We're talking about a time where that concept is basically abolished where people actually live in peace. Isn't that a wonderful picture!

But this gets better. Let's look over in Isaiah chapter 25. Also another major problem and evil today that people deal with is the problem of starvation, of hunger, of famine, of all the negative things that come with that. That's another problem that is solved during this time frame. It's Isaiah 25 and verse 6.

***Isaiah 25:6.*** *And in this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all people a feast of choice pieces, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of well-refined wines on the lees. (NKJ)*

In other words, this will be a time of abundance of good things. There won't be starvation and rationing of resources. There will be plenty.

Let's notice over in Amos chapter 9 another verse that speaks about this. It's Amos 9 and verse 13.

**Amos 9:13.** *"Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it.*

*14) I will bring back the captives of My people Israel; they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; they shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them.*

*15) I will plant them in their land, and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them," says the LORD your God. (NKJ)*

Notice this. We're talking about a time when the plowman overtakes the reaper. That means they are still harvesting the previous harvest when it's time to start plowing and planting for the new one.

A couple of years ago I was talking to Dale and Laura Roecks about this because they're in the farming business. I asked them. I said, "Can you help me kind of quantify exactly what does that mean in terms of the plowman overtaking the reaper? What does that tangibly mean?" And, of course, the answer was "It kind of depends on what crop you're talking about in what area of the world you're talking about." But he said, "Roughly speaking it's about twice your normal harvest. That is what that would be."

Now, if you think about that, if you're having about twice your normal harvest on a regular basis, you've got a world of abundance. You don't have starvation; you don't have famine; you don't have problems of hunger. You've got more food than you probably know what to do with. This is the kind of world we're looking at, but it even gets better.

Let's work over to Isaiah chapter 35. Not only is farming and the crops going to be in great abundance, the earth itself is going to be like a Garden of Eden type of environment. It's Isaiah chapter 35 and we'll start reading in verse 1. It says:

**Isaiah 35:1.** *The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose;*

*2) It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the excellence of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the excellency of our God. (NKJ)*

Now let's jump down to half way through verse 6.

**Isaiah 35:6b.** *... For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.*

*7) The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water; in the habitation of jackals, where each lay, there shall be grass with reeds and rushes. (NKJ)*

Let's also turn over to Isaiah chapter 41 just to finish this thought. Isaiah 41 and we'll start in verse 18.

***Isaiah 41:18.*** *I will open rivers in desolate heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.*

*19) I will plant in the wilderness the cedar and the acacia tree, the myrtle and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the cypress tree... (NKJ)*

Notice cypress trees grow in very wet areas. We're talking about cypress trees in the desert. In other words, there is no more dry, desolate areas if you can plant a cypress tree there because it requires lots of water.

Let's continue on.

***Isaiah 41:19b.*** *... and the pine and the box tree together,*

*20) That they may see and know, and consider and understand together, that the hand of the LORD has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it. (NKJ)*

Notice we're seeing a Garden of Eden type environment of the earth where there is plenty of food available. People are living in peace. There is not war and strife. But it even gets better than this.

Let's turn over now back to Isaiah chapter 35. Isaiah 35 and this time we'll start in verse 5.

***Isaiah 35:5.*** *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.*

*6) Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing. (NKJ)*

Imagine a world with no rheumatoid arthritis and there wouldn't be prayer updates like we've been hearing for Mr. Gary Klar because people won't be suffering like that. No multiple sclerosis. No muscular dystrophy. No diabetes. Imagine this kind of world where there are no major health sufferings. There is not starvation. There's not war. There is plenty of food. It's a Garden of Eden type of environment. It even gets a little better than this.

Turn with me to Isaiah chapter 11. Isaiah chapter 11 and verse 6:

**Isaiah 11:6.** *The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.*

*7) The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.*

*8) The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den.*

*9) They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. (NKJ)*

Even wild animals that we think of today as predators (that we maybe fear and want to stay away from) will be tame! You can have them for pets.

Now, my sister and I both share a fascination with tigers. Just to pick on her a little bit. If you look at the desktop on her laptop, it's a picture of a Bengal tiger. She was showing me that recently because we both share a fascination with tigers. This is a world where you can have a Bengal tiger for a pet and not have to worry if you turn your back on him that he's going to get upset with you one day and bite you in the neck and kill you because they will be tame.

But imagine this picture. Doesn't this sound fantastic? You have a thousand-year period where there is no war. There is no strife. There is no famine or disease. There are tame animals. There is plenty of food. You're living in a Garden of Eden environment. That sounds fantastic, does it not, when you compare it to our world today?

But let me ask you a question. Is the picture I just described our ultimate hope? Is this the solution to all of mankind's problems? Does this solve everything? No. No, it doesn't because we're still physical and we still have sin.

Let me show you an example. Turn to Zechariah chapter 14 and we'll see a picture of things that can happen even in this ideal environment that is a physical utopia. There are still problems to deal with. Turn to Zechariah 14 and verse 16.

**Zechariah 14:16.** *And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.*

*17) And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain.*

*18) If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the LORD strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.*

*19) This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. (NKJ)*

You might have noticed in Gary's sermon yesterday, he was talking about James chapter 5 and verse 15 that oftentimes we miss the word *if* there. I was having a conversation with him after services yesterday and he mentioned that oftentimes the *if* gets mentioned here—"*If* Egypt doesn't come up to keep the Feast."

But you notice the way all this is covered, obviously, God is expecting, whether or not it's the Egyptians, some people are going to be boneheads and just refuse to come up to keep the Feast. Even in this ideal environment where God has just made life wonderful for everybody, He says, "I'm commanding you to come every year; keep the Feast; keep My holy days." There are just going to be some people who go, "No, I'm just going to insist on doing it my own way. I'm just not going to bend. I'm just a bonehead." Even in that situation, God is going to have to withhold rain and punish people who just want to rebel even under the best of circumstances.

Here we still have sin. We still have physical human beings with our physical weaknesses doing stupid things. That's just why I mentioned is this ideal picture our ultimate hope. No. No, it's not. It's a wonderful picture. It's something great to look forward to, but it doesn't solve everything. Is it the ultimate hope that we should look forward to and the ultimate picture? No.

One of the things we're going to see here today is the holy days are wonderful things. They picture the major steps in the plan of God. But one of the points I'm going to get at today is we need to realize, even in what we're here picturing in the Millennium, this is not the ultimate outcome. These are steps in a ladder to get to the ultimate outcome.

What we're going to see here today—and I'm getting a little bit ahead of the story—our ultimate hope is next Tuesday and forward. Here's what I mean by this. Understand I'm not trying to establish some new holy day. I'm making an analogy here. I'm not doing anything heretical. But when you see the seven major holy days, especially the fall holy days, they picture major events in the plan of God. They are rungs in a ladder to get us to the ultimate outcome of what our ultimate hope is. Again, I'm not in any way taking away from the holy days. They are wonderful things. They are commanded. If we don't keep them, we lose sight of God's great plan.

But, as we're going to see before the sermon is over, our ultimate hope is next Tuesday and beyond. And the reason I say this is because we all know that Monday is the Last Great Day. It pictures the time when everyone who has lived throughout the history of mankind gets their chance at salvation. But it's still a time when we have physical human beings who sin. It's not the ultimate answer.

Even looking at, like I said, the thousand years of this idealistic time, we still have sin, but let's look even more so at what happens after that. Turn with me to Revelation 20 and verse 7. Let's see what happens right after this thousand-year period. Revelation 20:7:



**Revelation 20:7.** *Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison*

*8) and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea.*

*9) They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. (NKJ)*

Now we have just in these couple of scriptures what you might describe as the Reader's Digest version of the story. It's the very brief version and we're about to look in more detail in Ezekiel. But notice we're talking about a war here! This is even after the time that Christ has returned and the firstfruits are ruling over the earth, but we have a war situation here.

Let's turn over to Ezekiel chapter 38 because Ezekiel 38 and 39 give us what you might call the unabridged version of the story. They give us a lot more detail. It's Ezekiel chapter 38. Now, both of these chapters go into great detail about this whole battle with Gog and Magog. What I'm going to do for time's sake is just cover some sections of this, but we're going to start actually in verse 10, in Ezekiel 38 and verse 10.

**Ezekiel 38:10.** *'Thus says the Lord GOD: "On that day it shall come to pass that thoughts will arise in your mind, and you will make an evil plan: (NKJ)*

As I mentioned, if you have human beings, you've still got sin. You've still got evil.

**Ezekiel 38:11.** *"You will say, 'I will go up against a land of unwalled villages; I will go to a peaceful people, who dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates'—*

*12) "to take plunder and to take booty, to stretch out your hand against the waste places that are again inhabited, and against a people gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell in the midst of the land.*

*13) "Sheba, Dedan, the merchants of Tarshish, and all their young lions will say to you, 'Have you come to take plunder? Have you gathered your army to take booty, to carry away silver and gold, to take away livestock and goods, to take great plunder?'"*

*14) "Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say to Gog, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "On that day when My people Israel dwell safely, will you not know it?"*

*15) "Then you will come from your place out of the far north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great company and a mighty army.*

*16) "You will come up against My people Israel like a cloud, to cover the land. It will be in the latter days that I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me, when I am hallowed in you, O Gog, before their eyes."*

17) *'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Are you he of whom I have spoken in former days by My servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied for years in those days that I would bring you against them?"*

18) *"And it will come to pass at the same time, when Gog comes against the land of Israel," says the Lord GOD, "that My fury will show in My face.*

19) *"For in My jealousy and in the fire of My wrath I have spoken: 'Surely in that day there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel,*

20) *'so that the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all creeping things that creep on the earth, and all men who are on the face of the earth shall shake at My presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground.'*

21) *"I will call for a sword against Gog throughout all My mountains," says the Lord GOD. "Every man's sword will be against his brother.*

22) *"And I will bring him to judgment with pestilence and bloodshed; I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone.*

23) *"Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the LORD."*

*(NKJ)*

This sounds more similar to our world today. Doesn't it? Bloody battles, people wanting to go to war in strife and hatred so they can steal and rape and pillage. Doesn't this sound more familiar to what we look at today?

This is an ugly battle. And what we're about to see here in a moment is it's not a minor skirmish. The Bible doesn't give us exact numbers or anything but we can see later in chapter 39 this is a very significant battle by virtue of the weapons and how long it takes people to bury all the bodies.

When you see this situation, again we have a very ugly sin and evil picture here. Don't we? This is why I'm mentioning that the physical things are not our ultimate hope. That's what I'm getting out of the story.

Let's jump now over to Ezekiel 39 and we'll pick up in verse 9.

***Ezekiel 39:9.*** *"Then those who dwell in the cities of Israel will go out and set on fire and burn the weapons, both the shields and bucklers, the bows and arrows, the javelins and spears; and they will make fires with them for seven years.*

10) *"They will not take wood from the field nor cut down any from the forests, because they will make fires with the weapons; and they will plunder those who plundered them, and pillage those who pillaged them," says the Lord GOD. (NKJ)*

Now notice this. First of all notice, they're using very primitive weapons. It's spears; it's swords; it's bow and arrows because realize for a thousand years prior to this,

there were no war machines like we have today. They weren't building tanks and helicopters and fighter jets and ICBMs and such because this was a world where war wasn't taught.

So, after this is over, and I personally suspect it was probably a number of years from the time Satan is released until he gets people into this kind of a frenzy because, as you know, Satan tends to be more subtle. He tends to take some time to slowly lead people to a bad conclusion. He doesn't just immediately come to you and say, "Let's completely rebel against God" because we don't tend to fall for that. We tend to... It's just a little and a little more and a little more and then he talks you into doing something like this.

And you have these very primitive weapons, but after this battle is over an entire nation can burn these for firewood for seven years! Think about that. This wasn't a small skirmish. This wasn't a limited little bit of war. There were a lot of people involved in this if they had enough weapons that an entire nation could use them for firewood for seven years.

Let's also notice how long it takes to bury the bodies. Let's pick up in verse 11.

**Ezekiel 39:11.** *"It will come to pass in that day that I will give Gog a burial place there in Israel, the valley of those who pass by east of the sea; and it will obstruct travelers, because there they will bury Gog and all his multitude. ... (NKJ)*

It's actually causing traffic jams, all the efforts to bury the bodies.

**Ezekiel 39:11b.** *... Therefore they will call it the Valley of Hamon Gog.*  
12) *"For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them, in order to cleanse the land.*  
13) *"Indeed all the people of the land will be burying them, and they will gain renown for it on the day that I am glorified," says the Lord GOD.*  
14) *"They will set apart men regularly employed, with the help of a search party, to pass through the land and bury those bodies remaining on the ground, in order to cleanse it. At the end of seven months they will make a search.*  
15) *"The search party will pass through the land; and whenever anyone sees a man's bone, he shall set up a marker by it, till the buriers have buried it in the Valley of Hamon Gog.*  
16) *"The name of the city will also be Hamonah. Thus they shall cleanse the land." (NKJ)*

Now, notice that! An entire nation can be involved in the cleanup and the burying of the bodies. And there are people employed full time to do this. And it takes over seven months to bury all the bodies. Again, the Bible doesn't tell us how many people are involved here, how many bodies, but just think about that. This is a

significant event. There is a large population involved in this by virtue of how all this plays out.

My ultimate point in looking at this is, again, notice: As long as we still have human beings, we still have human nature, we have sin and we have all the pain and the problems that come with it.

Although these holy days are wonderful pictures and they focus us on the events in the future in what God is planning, is this our ultimate hope, this physical picture that still has human beings in it? No.

What is our ultimate hope? What is that picture that we should be focused on with great pleasure that will motivate us to stay on track, to want to purify ourselves to not cast off restraint? It's the exact same picture that the heroes of Hebrews 11 were looking for in their lives. Turn with me over to Hebrews 11. It's Hebrews 11. We'll start reading in verse 8.

**Hebrews 11:8.** *By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would [afterwards] receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.*

*9) By faith he [sojourned] in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; (NKJ)*

Now notice verse 10.

**Hebrews 11:10.** *for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. (NKJ)*

That's what Abraham was focused on. It's the New Jerusalem. That's what he was looking for. This is the picture when Abraham was going through his trials, when he was told to leave and move off. God says, "Pack your stuff and go that way. I'll tell you when to stop." He's sojourning around and God tells him, "You know that son you waited twenty-five years for? And now he's finally grown up and you've finally gotten your dream, take him to the mountain and kill him for me. Oh, no—psych! I really don't want you to kill him. Just wanted to see what you would do." While he's going through all of this, what's in his mind that's keeping him in track of all of this. He's looking to that city whose builder and maker is God. He's looking forward to the New Jerusalem.

But it's not just Abraham. It's **all** of the heroes in Hebrews 11 that were doing this. If you'll turn the page, at least in my Bible, to Hebrews 11 verse 13.

**Hebrews 11:13.** *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*

14) For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland.  
15) And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. (NKJ)

In other words, if they had been focused on their lives today (just the physical, just what's going on around them), they would have cast off restraint. They would have had opportunity to return back to their sinful lives and to give up the promises that God had offered them. But let's notice and continue reading in verse 16.

**Hebrews 11:16.** *But now they desire a better [country], that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. (NKJ)*

What city is he talking about? The New Jerusalem. We're talking about a timeframe when everything is spiritual. That is the solution to all of mankind's problems.

There is not a physical solution to that because as long as you have sin, as long as you have physical weaknesses and our shortcomings, you're going to have problems. As long as you have human beings, you've got death by necessity because all men are appointed once to die. When you have death, you have sorrow, crying, and pain—if nothing else. None of that goes away until we get beyond the physical to a spiritual world where we can all be like God. That's the ultimate picture of our ultimate hope.

To focus on that, let's turn over to Revelation chapter 21 and verse 1.

**Revelation 21:1.** *Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. (NKJ)*

Notice, we're talking about a spiritual heaven, a spiritual earth. One of the ways you know that is notice it says, "There was no more sea." On planet earth today, approximately 50% of the oxygen supply that we all depend upon to survive—not just us but the animals and lots of plant life and everything—is produced from the oceans. It's produced from plankton in those oceans to provide all the oxygen. The other half is mostly done by trees that provide that oxygen. If there is no more sea in this, you don't need this oxygen production. You don't have a physical planet. You don't have human beings who need to breathe because this is all spiritual. That's our ultimate solution here.

Pick up in verse 2:

**Revelation 21:2.** *Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

3) *And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.*

4) *"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." (NKJ)*

That is the picture of our ultimate hope. This can only happen in an environment where it is all God-beings. There is no more physical. There is no more sin. There are no more human weaknesses and our stupid decisions and our screw-ups in our lives. When it's all spiritual, that's when this can come about.

What I'm going to try to do today in the rest of the sermon is give us a picture of what that can look like. Something, hopefully, we can focus on and anticipate with pleasure as we go through our lives day to day facing our trials and problems and the struggles that we deal with in our physical life. I'm going to try to create something that we can look to and look forward to.

Before I go any further, I'd like to give an important disclaimer.

About a month ago I was up visiting the Worden, Illinois congregation and spending several days with my good buddy, Harold Lee. As he and I love to do over a four-day weekend, we'll sit around and philosophize and talk about all manner of subjects. In a four-day weekend, we can solve just all the world's problems (chuckling).

We were discussing this particular aspect of the New Jerusalem and the spirit realm and what this will be like. Harold made a very important point I'd like to share today. It's kind of a disclaimer going forward. He said:

When we as just physical, limited human beings try to understand and conceptualize the spirit realm and try to talk about it and try to teach it, it's something that we can have very limited understanding and grasp of because we've just lived our physical lives with our limited physical minds. And we're trying to grasp this world [the spirit realm] and understand it.

He said:

Oftentimes we can be like a couple of three-year-olds trying to explain to someone what our dad does for a living.

Because if you think about it, if you've ever asked a small child, "What does your daddy do for a living?", you're probably going to get a cute and oftentimes humorous response. "Well, he must color a lot. And he plays with his trucks" or whatever because they have a very limited grasp of what that is. In their little mind, they're explaining it the best they understand, but they have a very limited grasp of what that is because they are a small child.

We are kind of the same way. When we as limited, physical human beings try to understand the spirit realm and what is that all about, how do we quantify and wrap our minds around this and explain it, we're oftentimes like little kids trying to explain what our dad does for a living. We're speaking about our limited grasp of it all and trying to make it make sense, but, again, we only grasp that much of it.

So, I'm just going to give the disclaimer upfront. As we start to talk about this subject, remember you're dealing with a three-year-old who is trying to explain to you what my dad does for a living. And I'm not trying to say in this that to have all the answers and to have all this figured out because three-year-olds just don't do that. Again, you're dealing with a three-year-old explaining to you what my dad does for a living.

Let's pick up now in verse 5.

**Revelation 21:5.** *Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."*

6) *And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts."*

7) *"He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son."*

8) *"But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (NKJ)*

I mentioned before this is a timeframe when just the spiritual will exist. The reason it is our ultimate hope, where all problems are solved, is sin has been done away with at that point. All sinners have been tossed into the lake of fire. At this point, one of two outcomes has come about. People have either yielded to God, been molded in His image, and born into His family with a perfect nature then, or they've blown it. And they've just refused to follow God's way and He's thrown all of that in the lake of fire. So, all sin and sinners are removed from the picture. This is why it works.

A physical utopia is not our ultimate hope. It doesn't solve everything. What solves everything is a spiritual utopia where:

- There is no more self-will.
- There is no more sin.
- There is no rebellion.
- There is no more "I have to do it my way."

It's all just willing to do it God's Way. That results in ultimate peace and the solution to all of mankind's problems.

Because ultimately what we have to realize is: We are the problem!

Oftentimes when you see like today in an election year, the Democrats will say, "Well, the Republicans are the problem. If you put us in, we'll solve everything." And the Republicans say, "No, the Democrats are the problem. If you put us in, that'll solve everything." No! We, as mankind, we are the problem.

We have to realize the person in the mirror that is the problem. Until that is defeated and overcome, we're not going to solve our problem, because we are the problem. "We have seen the enemy and they is us!"

So, it's when that is all done away with, that's when we get to our ultimate hope, to the spiritual utopia. That's what we're really longing for here.

Let's pick up again now in verse 9.

**Revelation 21:9.** *Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." (NKJ)*

Notice that's what he's describing here next is the bride, the Lamb's wife.

**Revelation 21:10.** *And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,*

*11) having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.*

*12) Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:*

*13) three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.*

*14) Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

*15) And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall.*

*16) The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal.*

*17) Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel.*

*18) The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass.*

*19) The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: (NKJ)*



Now I'm not going to subject all of you to me mispronouncing all the names of these stones because I know I will. So, we're just going to skip down to verse 21.

**Revelation 21:21.** *The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.*

*22) But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.*

*23) The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.*

*24) And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it.*

*25) Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there).*

*26) And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it.*

*27) But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.*  
(NKJ)

Again, notice all sin and all sinners have been taken out of the picture. That's all been thrown in the lake of fire. That doesn't even exist anymore. That's how you can have this perfect world because even, as you know, even if you don't directly sin yourself, sin has a ripple effect. Even if you're not the one who actually committed the sin, you can oftentimes get affected by it.

Sin is oftentimes like going out to a pond and taking a rock and throwing it in the water. If you've ever done that, what you notice is there's ripple waves that go out in every direction from the rock. And the bigger the rock, the bigger the waves and the farther they go out. Sin works the same way. You throw that in there and even though, again, one person may have committed the sin, lots of innocent bystanders tend to get hit with the waves that are going out in all the directions.

So, the only way you can have a perfect society where all problems are solved, is there is no sin anymore and it's all spiritual. That's the only way to get there.

Let's also try to look a little bit at what this world could be like going forward. And again, keeping in mind the disclaimer that you're dealing with a three-year-old trying to explain to you what my dad does for a living.

If the analogy holds true in terms of what it would look like physically... Physically here today on earth, we have a planet we call earth and there's a city called Jerusalem that's on that planet. Now Jerusalem does not encase that entire world. It's one city and there's lots of world around it. If that analogy holds true, then here are some ideas we can kind of glean from that. And, again, notice I said "IF" because I'm a three-year-old explaining what my dad does for a living.

If you have a spiritual earth (and if the analogy holds true) and the New Jerusalem is one city on that earth, that means there are lots more around that. But notice what it described as the New Jerusalem was. This is “the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” This is your 144,000 firstfruits, living there with God the Father and Jesus Christ at this point.

Well, what would be on the rest of that planet? Logically think about that. What does this plan of salvation tell us? We’re just the first ones beings called right now. When we get to the Millennium and the Last Great Day and all going forward, there are billions of other people given their opportunity to also be born into God’s family. So, obviously millions and billions of additional God-beings will have come into existence by that time. My speculation, again as a three-year-old, is they inhabit the rest of that planet and all the other cities around it.

So, what will we be doing for all that time? Think about that. We finally get to the end of what we know as the story in the Bible. We get all the way through next Monday and we get to next Tuesday and beyond. What does life look like after that? Again, as a three-year-old, I don’t have a lot of detailed answers, but let’s just talk about that to think some of the picture of what can take place here.

Now, growing up in the Church all of my life, I’ve oftentimes heard a number of people express the idea that once you become a God-being, you know everything there is to ever know that could ever possibly be known. There’s no possibility then to learn anything additional, to develop any further. That’s kind of the end.

If that’s true then, if we get to the end of the plan where there are no more humans, then, what do several billion God-beings do now for the rest of eternity? Do we all sit around on clouds and eat bonbons and just enjoy the environment around us? Is that all there is? Or is there more? Is there a possibility for us to learn, to grow, to have other challenges, to be developed more?

Let me ask you a question. Is it possible for a God-being to learn? Is it possible for a God-being to learn or advance any further? Well, that’s a question we can conclusively answer from the Bible. If you paid close attention to Gary’s sermon yesterday, you already know the answer because we’re going to go to some scriptures that he already read.

Turn with me to Hebrews chapter 5 and we’re going to read verses 7 and 8. But before I go there, I’d like to set the stage to get us thinking about this. What we’re looking at here is the example of Jesus Christ because if you read through this chapter, He is clearly the one being talked about here. Let’s get a picture of who Jesus Christ is and the experience He brings to this before we look at this particular scripture to get full context here.

Now, as we know, Jesus Christ is an eternal being. He has always existed. We can’t measure how long He’s been around. That would require a starting point. Without a starting point, you can’t measure. He’s eternal.

We also know from John chapter 1 and Colossians chapter 1 that He created everything that we know in our physical universe. In fact, John 1 tells us He basically created everything. It says in the beginning there was Jesus Christ; there was God the Father. And everything else that came into existence, Jesus Christ made it. So, that tells us that everything in our world that we understand, He is responsible for making. As far as designing the human experience, He is the one that did all the hands-on creation of that. He is also, therefore, the One who created Adam and Eve. He designed and made mankind hands-on.

We also know He is the God of the Old Testament. So, for the 4,000 years prior to Him coming and living on earth, He was the one who talked to Adam and Eve in the Garden. He's the one who told Noah to build an ark. He's the one who told Abraham, "Pack your stuff. Go that way. I'll tell you when to stop." He's the one who said, "Take Isaac. Go kill him." He's the one who talked face-to-face to Moses. For 4,000 years, He had first-hand interaction with mankind.

Now, being the one who designed the human experience, who made it hands-on, and who worked with mankind for 4,000 years before becoming a human being, if there was anyone who, it could be said, knew everything there ever was to know about the human experience with no ability to learn further, it would be Him. Would it not? Logically, that's what you would have to conclude.

Now, let's read Hebrews chapter 5 verses 7 and 8. We're picking into the thought here, but he's referring to, as you see in the previous verses, Melchizedek. We're talking about Jesus Christ.

**Hebrews 5:7.** *who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, 8) though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. (NKJ)*

Here we have it directly in the Bible. Jesus Christ learned.

Just to further validate this, the Greek word that is translated as the English word *learned* here is transliterated as *manthano* (*man-than'-o*). It's Strong's #3120 and according to Thayer's Greek Lexicon, here's how it's defined:

to learn, to be appraised  
a) to increase one's knowledge, to be increased in knowledge

So, clearly what this verse is saying is by virtue of what Jesus Christ suffered, His knowledge increased. He learned.

So, regardless of however little of an increase that was compared to the vast understanding He already had, my point is, there was an increase because that's what it means. He increased His knowledge. He learned. In some way He got a deeper understanding than He previously had.

Now, I'm not claiming to know everything about what that is or how much that learning was, but if we run back over to Hebrews 2 and verse 17 (This is another scripture Gary read yesterday.), we can get an idea of what some of that learning was. Hebrews 2:17.

**Hebrews 2:17.** *Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, ... (NKJ)*

Why is it that He had to be made like His brethren?

**Hebrews 2:17b.** *... that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.  
18) For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. (NKJ)*

Now, notice the wording of how this describes it. First of all, one of the reasons this had to happen was so that He could be the propitiation for our sins. Well, obviously that was just required for Him to become human to be the sacrifice to die for us.

But notice it says one of the other reasons why this had to happen was so that He would be a merciful and faithful High Priest. Notice it doesn't say just so He would be perceived as a merciful and faithful High Priest. It says this was required so that He would be that. Now, understand I'm not in any way suggesting that Jesus Christ wasn't incredibly merciful prior to that.

But if He had to be made like that to become this, there was some level of development or learning. There was some deeper appreciation for the experience that we go through as a result of having gone through this. This is why He learned from the things that He suffered. There was a deeper appreciation for what the human experience was like because He's been there, done that, got the T-shirt. He's actually walked in our shoes. But it wasn't just so that we would say, "Yes that Guy's walked in our shoes. So He understands." There was also some level of a developmental process that took place.

Now please understand. I'm not saying He wasn't incredibly merciful to begin with. Obviously, He was. But what the Bible says is there was some level of advancement of learning as a result of that.

So, if Jesus Christ Himself, having been an eternal God-being, who has existed forever through all of His experience could become an inferior human being and learn even just a little, think about it . When we get turned into God-beings, what is

our experience? We have lived a few mere decades as inferior human beings and then will be raised to the level of God-beings. Wouldn't it make sense that we could have a lot to learn, that there could be development there (regardless of exactly what that means)?

But also think of another process. If you look at just the population numbers of how the whole process plays out when the firstfruits are put in charge. If you just look at that, you're going to see a similar logic in today's world and it suggests a developmental process.

Let me ask you a question. In today's employment world, does it typically make sense to take a new college graduate out of school, a couple years of experience under their belt and promote them to a senior vice president level over a large division of a corporation with a multi-million dollar budget and dozens of direct and indirect reports under them and expect them to successfully manage that without a lot of problems? Does that generally work well? No. It doesn't because you are generally promoting someone beyond the level of what they're able to understand, of what their experience has brought them to.

Just to follow that logic—and realize I'm just giving a loose analogy here—look at the population numbers of how things play out in what the holy day plan tells us. Approximately on the earth today, there are about seven billion people that are alive. But Jesus Christ doesn't come back and place the firstfruits over a population of seven billion. He could do that, but prophecy tells us that's not what happens. When the Day of the LORD plays out, the vast majority of mankind is dead by the time Jesus Christ returns and the Millennium is set up. Whatever number that is, it's hard to exactly quantify. We speculate at times that maybe it's a few hundred million, but it's very obvious it's a very small percentage of what we have today. The firstfruits are then placed in charge of that number.

What logically happens over the next thousand years? The population steadily grows and it's going to grow and grow as the years go forward. But you notice before He takes all the billions of mankind who have ever lived and says, "Now, rule over them," it's a thousand years later. Doesn't it kind of look like a training/development process—whatever that exactly means in the spirit realm—that we then learn and grow and are developed?

Then jump forward again to the New Jerusalem that we talked about before. Again, assuming that my analogy...and I'm putting lots of disclaimers because I'm a three-year-old telling you what my dad does for a living. When the rest of these God-beings get changed into being Gods, they're newbies. They just got their crown yesterday or last week or whatever the timeframe is.

We would have, then, a thousand plus years of experience. What logically would we be doing at least for some time here going forward? Helping to develop them! Acting like a firstborn!

My sister often jokes. She's the oldest in our family and she'll joke with our niece who is the oldest in their family about what it's like being a firstborn child because oftentimes as you're growing up, you're taking care of the younger ones and you're babysitting them.

This is a similar role where you are helping all the others develop who come along behind. That's kind of our role as firstfruits. But it certainly appears it doesn't just stop through their human process. There could be development and growth going forward throughout our spiritual role.

And, again, realize (I'm going to keep saying this) I'm a three-year-old telling you what my dad does for a living. I'm not suggesting we have all the answers. I just simply want us to look at a picture that there is forever going to be opportunities for growth, for advancement, new challenges to take on. What all does that mean? I don't know. I'm a three-year-old. But I think there are things to be excited about, ways to grow, new challenges to take on, ways to be developed, probably in ways we can't even comprehend or understand.

With that in mind, turn over to Isaiah chapter 9. We're going to read another very common scripture looked at this time of year. Isaiah 9 and we'll start reading in verse 6.

***Isaiah 9:6.*** *For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (NKJ)*

Obviously, we're talking about Jesus Christ here. With all these titles, that's very conclusive we're talking about Jesus Christ. Notice the beginning of verse 7.

***Isaiah 9:7.*** *Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, ... (NKJ)*

The government he's talking about is His dominion, all that's under Him. That's us. That's all of mankind that wind up being turned into God-beings and are ruling with Him. That's part of the dominion He has going forward.

Notice it says of the increase of this, there shall be no end. I wouldn't suggest to tell you I understand what all that means and how to quantify that. But that means somehow going forward there is always some way to learn, to grow, to develop, to increase somehow. It doesn't just get static once you get to the God-being status and there are no more challenges. There's nothing else advanced to do for the rest of eternity. No, whatever it means in the spirit realm—and, again, as a three-year-old I can't quantify that for you—but whatever that means there are exciting challenges we can take on. There are new things we can learn. There are ways we can develop and help each other develop.

Again, what all does that mean in the spirit realm? I don't know, but the Bible very much indicates for us there is not just a situation where now, we finally made it to be God-beings. Now we just sit around and twiddle our thumbs and eat bonbons because there is nothing else to take on and do. No, there are more challenges. There is more growth that can take place.

He says of the increase of His government and of peace, there is no end. Somehow there is a way to increase peace! When you read about this in our world, that just kind of blows your mind—the amount of peace that this describes. Somehow that continues to increase.

What does all that mean? I don't know, but I think it makes a very exciting picture for us that it's not the situation as you oftentimes hear in the Protestant world where they believe you're just turned into angels when you ultimately get your reward. You're just sitting around on a cloud playing a harp and that's all you do for the rest of eternity. It's not like that. It's something where there are exciting challenges. There are new things to learn. There are ways to grow.

Personally, I believe whatever this means in the spirit realm we'll be continuing to grow in grace and knowledge for eternity, again, for whatever that means in the spirit realm.

My point in all of this sermon, again, is just to try to give us a picture because, as we've seen in the very beginning of this, if we don't have prophetic vision, if we're not focused on that ultimate hope, what happens to us as physical human beings? We cast off restraint. We start compromising with God's law. We start getting discouraged and giving up and getting distracted from what we should be really focused on.

But if we anticipate with pleasure the exciting future that God has for us, what does that do? It wants to purify us. We want to be more like Him. We anticipate it with pleasure. We're excited about it. We're motivated. We want to become more like Him. We want to live more His way because we want to be there to experience this.

Think of it as a child being told they're going to go to Disneyland. What happens? They're all excited and they're bouncing around the house for the week before and they can't sleep the night before because "I'm going to Disneyland tomorrow!" They anticipate it with pleasure. That's how we should be looking at God's plan and the future that's out there in front of us.

So, understand the timeframe we're here to picture is the Millennium, this physical utopia, this is fantastic. It will be great to see!

Is it our ultimate hope? No. No, it's not. Because just like Abraham and all the heroes of Hebrews 11, what we should really look forward to—not that we don't look

forward to these things because we do—but what we should really ultimately be looking forward to and striving for is that city whose builder and maker is God. It is the New Jerusalem. It is when everything is spiritual and there is no more sin to put up with. There is none of the ripple effect. There are not innocent bystanders getting hurt. It's just peace and God's love forever.

In the storybooks today that you oftentimes read to your children or we had read to us when we were little kids, very oftentimes the way the story ends is "They all lived happily ever after." The way I'd like to conclude today is that is the picture of our ultimate hope. When you ask, "What is our ultimate hope?" It is the feel-good happy ending.

And that's found in Revelation 21 verse 4.

***Revelation 21:4.*** "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." (NKJ)

Brethren, that is our ultimate hope!