

When the Son of Man Returns, Will He Really Find Faith on the Earth?

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Brethren, looking at our culture today, I think we can easily describe our modern world very much as a secular culture. What I mean by that is we have a culture today that, in many ways, denies the very existence of God. The theory of evolution is widely accepted among many, particularly in the fields of science and education where the absolute existence of there even being a creator God is absolutely denied, let alone having any faith in that God to do what He says He will do.

You might say in popular religion today, where many acknowledge the existence of a creator God and would say that all this was created and we are here because there is a creator, if you press them for what that really means in their life, even those that profess that the Bible is His word and it is His instruction for us, when you see how that plays out in their day-to-day life, you often find that they don't really believe that God is who He says He is in the Bible and that He will do what He says He will do. Mostly you'll find that there is a great lack of faith in God in our society today. That is a condition that was prophesied to be the case of the end time generation that we are in today, that it would be a major problem, not only in the world, but in the Church of God.

Today we're going to look at that particular issue. The title of this sermon is:

When the Son of Man Returns, Will He Really Find Faith on the Earth?

We will see that this isn't a problem that was just prophesied to affect the world at large, those who were deceived and God is not working with, it was also prophesied to be a problem that would affect the Church of God, those that God is working with.

Please turn to Luke 18, and go to the parable. You probably recognized the direct quote from where I took the title for this message. We will start with what is commonly referred to as the Parable of the Persistent Widow.

Luke 18:1. *Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart,*

2) saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him,

3) And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man,

4) yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.'"

5) Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said.

6) And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?"

7) I tell you that He will avenge them speedily... (NKJV)

Notice this last sentence. This is where I took the title for this message.

7b) ... Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (NKJV)

Notice that particular question. You can tell He is expecting that in the end time, there would be a great lack of faith in God.

We will come back to this parable later and glean some deeper lessons.

Notice first of all that this problem is not just something that was prophesied to be a problem with our society at large. As I mentioned, our society, to a large extent, denies the very existence of God, let alone believing He is who He says He is and will do what He says He will do. They don't believe that there's a creator God in the first place. Even if they do believe in a creator God, often they don't take Him that seriously in terms of how they live their lives. You might say that they believe that He is, but they don't really believe He's going to do what He says He is going to do.

Let's turn to Revelation 3. This isn't just a prophecy for this society at large, it's also prophesied to be a problem within the Church of God. If you're familiar with Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, these chapters contain seven letters to different churches. At the time the book of Revelation was written, there were seven different churches in these cities that were on a mail route. They existed simultaneously. You can also look at these as successive eras throughout the church. If you study into the history, you will find distinct parallels of the historical progression of the church in what is described in these letters.

The final era of the church is called the Laodicean Era, and if you take an honest look at the Church of God today and what is described in this letter, you'll find some striking parallels.

Revelation 3:14. *"And to the angel of the church of the Laodicean¹ write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:*

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

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

Notice what He is saying here. Other translations say, *"I am about to vomit you out of my mouth."* That's very graphic, but that is exactly what the Bible is referring to here. Consider what this is actually saying. This is Jesus Christ who is writing this. He says, *"I am about to eject you out of my body."* As you know, the body of Christ is the church. This is the group that can be born into the God family and become the first fruits. He is saying, *"You are in such bad condition, I'm about to eject you out of my body, if you*

don't repent and change." This is a very serious warning He is giving. Notice in verse 17. This is why He is about to eject them.

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

In other words, He is saying, "Not only are you in horrible spiritual condition, you are delusional, because you think you're in good condition. You think you're rich and increased with goods and in need of nothing, and in reality, you are in a horrible mess and you don't even realize it."

In verse 18, He gives us a three-step formula for solving this problem. We're going to delve into it to see what this is saying, but also keep in mind the fact that He is suggesting these three steps. He says, "If you follow these three steps, this is going to solve this horrible condition you are in. Obviously, that means they are not already doing these things, by virtue of the fact He's saying, "Here is what you need to do to solve it."

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

What is He referring to here? As we're going to see, this is a three-step process and He is giving a formula, a prescription to solve the problem.

To understand what is being referred to, we're going to let the Bible interpret what each of these statements is actually saying, rather than coming up with our own meanings.

The first statement is: I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire that you may be rich. What is this referring to? To understand the first symbol, turn to 1 Peter 1 and we'll start in verse 6.

***1 Peter 1:6.** In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,
7) that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, (NKJV)*

What is He referring to when He said, "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire"? He is referring to faith. He is saying, "You have a lack of faith as the first step in solving your problem." That's kind of the correlation with all of this, where we're ultimately going with this sermon.

To understand the whole formula, let's turn to Revelation 3, and look at the other two symbols He is referring to. The next thing He says is: *and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed.* Again, what is He referring to? As before, let's allow the Bible to interpret its own symbols.

Revelation 19:7. *Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."*

8) *And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. (NKJV)*

Being arrayed in white garments, He is talking about righteous acts.

Think of what we've just covered in this formula. He's saying, "First you need to have faith in God, and that needs to lead you to behaving righteously."

We won't take the time to go through James, chapter 2, but as you know, it describes there that you demonstrate your faith by your works, by your actions. That's because faith isn't just an intellectual belief that, yes, there's a creator God and He made everything; It's believing that He is who He says He is and He is going to do what He says He's going to do to the point that it motivates your actions. It motivates how you live your life, and you demonstrate that faith in how you conduct yourself. You obey God's laws because you take Him for real. We are motivated to follow that, and that results in righteous acts.

Turn back to Revelation 3, and we'll put the rest of the puzzle together. The last part of the verse is: *and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.*

Remember this was the church that is described as: *I am rich and increased with goods and in need of nothing, but you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked.* They are blind, and they don't see their condition. In this last step, He says to anoint your eyes with eye salve so you have accurate perceptions of the condition you are in.

To understand this, turn to 2 Peter 1, and again we will let the Bible interpret its own symbols.

2 Peter 1:5. *But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge,*

6) *to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness,*

7) *to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.*

8) *For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

9) *For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed [purged] from his old sins. (NKJV)*

Think about this. He's listing Godly character traits and saying, "If you lack these, what problem will you suffer from? You are going to be blind. You're not going to see things accurately. If you are having these character traits in your life and developing those, you're going to see well.

So, you see, if you put the puzzle together as we read in Revelation 3:18, He is saying that you need gold refined in the fire, you need faith, and white garments that the shame of your nakedness should not be revealed, righteous acts. You're not going to just believe in God, you're going to act on that belief and it will govern your life. By following those instructions, what are you going to do? You're going to develop Godly character on an ongoing basis, and what's that going to result in? It will give you a spiritual mindset where you see the world now more through God's eyes, from His perspective. So you think like Him more now and you also get an accurate view of yourself, because you're viewing it from His perspective and not our own deluded human nature. This three-step process would solve the horrible spiritual condition that the end-time church is in.

Notice how this whole formula starts off. You, first of all, need faith. You see, this ties in to what we started with in Luke, chapter 18.

Luke 18:7b. ... *Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (NKJV)*

He is expecting that faith to be absent. It's not just in the world at large, it's in the Church of God. We're talking about the Church of Laodicea. The church, by definition, are the people who have received the holy spirit. These are the first fruits. He is saying that this group as well will suffer from part of this problem.

I'm getting a bit ahead of myself, but the faith gets down to not only believing in God, but believing that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him. In other words, He is who He says He is and He is going to do what He says He will do.

With that in mind, let's start off with an accurate definition of faith. Please turn to where you would expect to go to give that definition, to Hebrews, chapter 11. What are the important components of this concept that we need to understand? If I ask most church members to define faith, this is exactly where you're going to turn.

Hebrews 11:1. *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

2) *For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.*

3) *By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. (NKJV)*

What that means is, the physical universe that we can see was made by a God that we can't see. That's how all of this came about.

But faith is much more than that, because when we think about faith, it's the evidence of things not seen, and that's going to enable us to fully understand and believe that there is an invisible God that made all of this. However, it's much more important that we go beyond just the understanding that there is a creator God that we cannot see who is the ultimate source of everything. There are more steps than that. Skip down to verse 6.

6) But without faith it is impossible to please Him [God], for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (NKJV)

You see, it's two steps. It's not just believing intellectually that He exists, because you have to start there. If you're believing in the theory of evolution and there is no creator God, obviously you're not going to have faith in a God that you don't believe exists in the first place. You have to believe that there is a God, but it's more than that. It's not only believing that He is who He says He is in the Bible, and He will do what He says He will do, but it's living your life according to that. Again, as James, chapter 2 illustrates, we demonstrate our faith by our works, by how we live, by how we conduct our lives. If we believe that God is who He says He is, He is ultimately the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. If we continue to follow Him and obey Him, we ultimately get rewarded with salvation.

It's also important to have an accurate understanding of what faith is. God will act in our best interest and reward us with salvation and He will do what is in our best interest to get us there. It's not always what we think is in our best interest. Sometimes we have an immature, superficial view of faith, and may tend to look at faith like it's a concept of a genie in a bottle. God's kind of the genie in the bottle and we rub the bottle and the genie comes out and we make our request to the genie, and as long as we fully believe in the genie and we believe that the genie has the power to do what it says it's going to do, then the genie is going to grant all of our wishes and give us everything we ask for. He's always going to protect us and save us from pain and deliver us out of every difficult situation. That's not how this works.

You have to understand that, yes, He is the ultimate rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, but sometimes the path in getting there has pain involved that we have to go through for our best interest. What that means is, God has our best interest at heart and He will always act in what is ultimately for our good and for the good of those around us. It's not always what we think is going to be best for us.

If you look through the rest of this chapter, you're going to see numerous examples of painful situations that people were in where God delivered them, protected them from their adversaries, delivered them from bad things happening to them because they believed in God. Those are all true, and those are the things we like to focus on. Yes, they believed in God and He rescued them and saved them from all the pain involved.

That's not the only picture. We must remember the latter part of this chapter as well. Consider verse 36. This is after it has given us examples and cited numerous

individuals and told us some of their stories and all the things that God did to deliver and protect them from difficult situations. However, He also picks up in verse 36 and says:

36) Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.

37) They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—

38) of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

39) And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise,

40) God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. (NKJV)

In other words, they are ultimately going to receive their reward at the first resurrection, when Christ returns and we all go up to the marriage supper and everyone is rewarded with salvation. Many of them died along the process, and sometimes in ugly and painful ways, not having received that yet, but believing that ultimately God would be the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Then they would receive that reward, and that motivated their lives. It's important to understand that this is what faith really means.

Again, sometimes we like to reduce it down to a genie in the bottle and as long as I believe in the genie, the genie gives whatever I want and always protects me from pain. All the bad stuff is taken out of my life. That's not how this works, because the process of building character literally requires that we go through adversity and suffering. That's called, suffering as Christ suffered, and that is part of the process.

The faith we must have, again, is not that God is always going to do everything we want exactly when we want it. He is going to act in our best interest and He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. He cares for us and He's looking out for us and protecting us, and we are ultimately going to get to our Promised Land. Our Promised Land is the Kingdom of God.

We're going to look at Ancient Israel in a minute, and their ultimate reward was physically the Promised Land, living in a nice location and in nice circumstances. For us it's the Kingdom of God. We have to keep in mind, that is the ultimate reward. That doesn't mean that everything between here and there is pain free. That's just not how that works. If you fall for that idea, you are setting yourself up for disillusionment.

Another thing that is important to realize, and it takes us back to where we started in Luke 18. At the very latter part of this parable, it makes the comment about when Christ returns, is He going to find much in the way of faith on the earth? There is going to be a crisis in this regard. Let's notice some other components of this story. The example used here is a widow before an unjust judge. She is dealing with a persecution type of

environment where she can't get justice, and there is not fairness, and this can wear a person down. That's what is being addressed here. We have to understand as physical human beings; this can affect our ability to have faith.

Luke 18:1. *Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, (NKJV)*

Notice that there's a connection here about losing heart, losing our faith and it affecting our diligence in how we pray.

Let's look at the meaning of the words translated as "losing heart." The Greek word that is transliterated into English is "ekkakeo." It's Strong's 1573. According to The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament by Spiros Zodhiates, it's defined as, *to turn out to be a coward, to lose one's courage. In the New Testament, to be faint hearted, to faint or despond in view of trial/difficulty, in the sense of to be remiss or slothful in duty.* Notice he's talking about basically caving in under trials and causing us to lose heart in our will to be diligent and move forward. It also says, *to be remiss or slothful in duty.* One of our duties as Christians is to continually pray and be connected with God. If we lose heart, we lose that desire and become slothful and not want to carry that out. We're going to see later in this sermon how this creates a cycle that just drains us and destroys us if we allow ourselves to do that.

Notice in this parable that this lady is living in an environment of injustice, in other words, in harsh circumstances and how that can wear a person down. It warns us not to fall into that.

With this in mind, we can learn a great deal from Ancient Israel. Paul tells us in Corinthians, the example of Ancient Israel, that these things occurred and they were recorded for our admonition upon whom the end of the ages have come. This was a training exercise basically to record all this so we could learn from their experiences and apply those lessons in our lives.

If you look at Ancient Israel, the original generation that came out of slavery that God was trying to reward with the Promised Land, almost all of them lost out of their ultimate reward because of their lack of faith. They believed God was, but He's not the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. If you follow their story, you can see that the circumstances they went through affected their ability to have faith in God, to believe and trust in Him. If you notice throughout their story, often there is a very pessimistic mindset amongst the Israelites. In spite of all the miracles they saw and all the ways that God delivered them, even in dramatic and supernatural ways, whenever a difficult situation comes up, and any trial or adversity, very quickly it's: "We're all going to die. God brought us out here to kill us. He is this mean and awful being, and there were no graves in Egypt, and He's going to do us in." You see that again and again.

Turn to Numbers, chapter 14, and notice how their mindset cost almost an entire generation their reward of the Promised Land. Let me set the background. As Israel

comes out of Egypt in they are journeying towards the Promised Land, and as they get closer to entering the Promised Land, they decided to make a strategic move you might say. They send out twelve spies to do some reconnaissance of the area before they make an invasion. These men spy out the land to bring back a report so they have some intelligence ahead of time before they try to make a military invasion. However, ten of the twelve men came back with a story saying, "We're all going to die. There are giants in the land, they're bigger and stronger than us, and we don't stand a chance. If we try to take them on, they're going to slaughter us, and we're all going to die."

There were two individuals, Caleb and Joshua, that came back with a different story. They indicated that it's a wonderful land. They agreed that there were giants there, but they said, "Why should we worry? We have God on our side. God promised to deliver all of this to us. Let's just trust Him and He will deliver it into our hands, and things are going to turn out great."

The majority of the people believed the ten who gave the bad report. Let's notice their response to all of this.

Numbers 14:1. *So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night.*

2) And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness!

3) Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?"

4) So they said to one another, "Let us select a leader and return to Egypt."
(NKJV)

Notice, it's a very fatalistic mentality. They said they were all going to die and they wanted to go right back to the slavery they were delivered from, the place where they were crying out for deliverance to be rescued.

That is what human beings so often do. We are drawn back into the destructive patterns of what we've done in the past. It's our human nature. Notice that this pessimistic attitude cost them everything, because their whole journey was to live in the Promised Land and have this great reward, but they lost it because of that.

Turn now to verse 26 and we'll pick up the story.

26) And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying,

27) "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me.

28) Say to them, 'As I live,' says the LORD, 'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you:

- 29) *The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above.*
- 30) *Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in.*
- 31) *But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised.*
- 32) *But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness.*
- 33) *And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness.*
- 34) *According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection.*
- 35) *I the LORD have spoken this. I will surely do so to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.”*
- 36) *Now the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land, who returned and made all the congregation complain against him by bringing a bad report of the land,*
- 37) *those very men who brought the evil report about the land, died by the plague before the LORD.*
- 38) *But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh remained alive, of the men who went to spy out the land. (NKJV)*

Only two individuals in this whole group lived through all of this and entered into the Promised Land. The rest lacked faith. It literally caused them to lose their ultimate reward. For them this was a physical contract of the Old Covenant, and the reward was to live in this great land.

For us, our Promised Land is the Kingdom of God. The same problem of the lack of faith can cost us our ultimate reward if we allow it to do so.

Before going any further, let's understand something else about faith. We look at this issue of a lack of faith and the problems this causes. God doesn't follow through and give what was originally promised because of a lack of faith. Sometimes when we look at this issue, we misunderstand this. To look at it from a humorous modern-day analogy, it's like kryptonite to Superman. If you're familiar with the story of Superman, there was a substance called kryptonite. Superman had super powers and he was a hero, but if he gets around kryptonite, suddenly it sucks all of his power away and he's a regular person, and he's not able to do supernatural things.

Sometimes I've seen church members, particularly those who are not called will look at the subject of faith as, "If we doubt and we lack faith, somehow it's like kryptonite to Superman and it prevents God from being able or have the power to bless us to do these things." That is not how this works at all. To understand the picture here, realize why God is not doing this. God doesn't follow through to fulfill blessings or requests to

someone who doesn't have faith. It's not like kryptonite taking His power away. He is acting in the best interest of the individuals involved.

The example we just read illustrates this very well. If you think about this story, what's happening with Ancient Israel, this is much more complex than just offering these people a nice place to live. Oftentimes, as physical human beings, we look at situations from a very limited perspective and sometimes one dimensional, and that one dimension is how it affects us. It's our immediate future, and that's how we look at it.

God looks at things more like a skilled chess player. You have the board and all the different pieces and He is skillfully moving all the pieces together for the ultimate good, because He's got different things that He is playing out with all of them. Often you look back at situations in your life, particularly if it's a while later and you now understand more factors that were involved. You often find that God didn't do something for just one reason and how it affected you. There were a half a dozen purposes that were all going on at the same time and different people were involved. He was strategizing this whole situation for everyone's benefit.

That is what's going on here as well. This isn't just about rewarding these people with a nice place to live. From their perspective, it's land flowing with milk and honey, I get a nice place to live and that's great. That's part of the picture. They also have to conquer the Canaanites when they take this land. Not only are there multiple purposes, there's a complex set of events that have to play out. God was working out a purpose for the Canaanites as well. We won't take the time to go through all the Biblical proof of this, but God was bringing judgment upon the Canaanites because this was a very evil, demonic, perverted, twisted culture, and God had had enough. He was bringing His judgment upon them. If you study the scriptures in the Old Testament, they were a very demonic culture, involved in demon worship and communicating with demons. They sacrificed their children in the fire to Molech, they were sexually perverted, and I don't mean just adultery and fornication, they were involved in all manner of incest and homosexuality and bestiality. It's all described in detail in the Bible. It was a very twisted culture.

So God is not just bringing this about as a reward for Israel, He's conquering these other people and bringing judgment upon them for their part of all this.

God also has a long-term plan of setting this nation up as an example for all the nations around them. It was to be a testimony that God's way works and results in prosperity.

Now for all of this to work out, Israel has to be willing to follow God's instructions. Here's a group who are not even willing to get started down this road, because they're so convinced that God is going to set them up and kill them and He won't fulfill anything that He says. They believe that He is, but not that He's the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Are they going to follow through on all the details of this, of conquering the Promised Land, following God's instructions, and all the steps along the way to make this plan work? No. If they're not willing to believe Him to even get started,

it's all going to be a disaster. So the smartest thing He can do for the benefit of everyone involved is to say, "You are not going into the land. I'm going to punish you in other ways." It isn't just about them, it's a much more complex picture.

If you continue to read on through the book of Numbers, when they realized that they were about to lose out on all of this, they changed their mind. "Okay, we'll go and try to take the land now." Moses tries to warn them and says, "No, don't do this. If you go up without God, you are destined to fail." They tried that and they failed. So they end up spending forty years in the wilderness.

The point in all of this is realizing that when God doesn't fulfill promises or doesn't bless those or grant a request because of a lack of faith, it isn't like that's the kryptonite to Superman. We don't somehow rob God of the ability to follow through, He is acting in the best interest of everyone involved, because He knows that every action has a chain reaction of events. Everything has an upside and a downside. Blessings also come with consequences and responsibility. If people are not willing to follow Him, they're going to mess things up, so He's not helping them, He's hurting them. That's why He's not doing this. So don't think of this as God somehow losing His power to be able to fulfill promises; He's acting out of the best interest of everyone involved.

Let's understand why Israel had such a difficult time with this issue of faith. I won't take the time to go through all the examples, but you'll find this reaction of, "We're all going to die, and God brought us out here to kill us." This is a common theme with Ancient Israel. From the time they get to the Red Sea and numerous times all along the way, whenever adversity hits them and things look difficult, you very quickly see them resorting to, "We're all going to die. We should have stayed in Egypt. He brought us out here to kill us because there's no graves in Egypt." It's a pessimistic, negative mindset.

Sometimes we look at this from a modern-day perspective and scratch our heads and say, "How does a people who saw such dramatic miracles have so much trouble trusting Him?" Well, the Bible gives us some insight into this. We need to understand the circumstances that they lived in. It adds an important piece to the puzzle.

Turn to Exodus, chapter 1. I'm sure most of you are familiar with the story. Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, moves with all of his sons to Egypt, and Joseph is already there and is prominent in the area. This gets the whole family there, and over time, they have more and more children and the nation grows and grows. Then it gets to the point where there's a leader that doesn't remember Joseph anymore and there's no loyalty to this family. Now this growing number of people is perceived as a political threat. They look at it strategically thinking that the group is getting more and more numerous, and if the Egyptians have a conflict and the Israelites sided with their enemies, they would be in trouble. They could be easily conquered.

Exodus 1:8. Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.

9) *And he said to his people, "Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we;*

10) *come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land."*

11) *Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses.*

12) *But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel.*

13) *So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor.*

14) *And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage—in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve was with rigor. (NKJV)*

Notice that the leader makes the decision to enslave the Israelites, and not only make them slaves, they make their day-to-day lives absolutely miserable. It's with harshness and cruelty that they are ruling over them. This was for multiple generations. To understand this, we need to look into the meaning of the word "rigor." That's not a word that we commonly throw around in our modern-day English. I never use that term. They made them serve with rigor. So what exactly does that mean, and what is the Bible getting at? The Hebrew word translated here is "rigor." It's translated into English as "perek." It's Strong's number 6531. According to the Complete Word Study Dictionary of the Old Testament by Warren Baker, it's defined as *a masculine noun referring to ruthlessness cruelty; it refers to a manner in which something is carried out. Israel was made to labor without mercy cruelly by Egypt.* In other words, their day-to-day lives of all that they knew was constantly being treated with cruelty. This was their entire experience in their whole life. Not only was it for this generation, this is true going back for multiple generations in their history.

So as these people grew up, they're not looking at life as happy endings and people look out for your best interest. They're just trying to get through life and survive the pain that is being thrown at them. You can easily see how they would grasp the mentality to use a common-day phrase: "Life is difficult, and then you die." You could see how they would take on that mentality, because that was their experience. They didn't think of it in terms of their hopes and dreams and how things are going to turn out positive for them, and one day life will be great. Their whole experience was that life is just cruel and harsh and mean, and you just try to get through it as best you can and survive the pain. That was their experience their entire lives.

It is easy for physical human beings to develop a mindset of learned helplessness in a situation like this. A person just internalizes the idea of, "I cannot control my world. I'm helpless, I can't do anything about it." Even if you were able to extract them from the environment that created that, that is still in their head even when they've been removed from those circumstances. This is what was happening to them.

Just to give an example, Moses comes and tells Israel, "God has sent me to deliver you. He's going to take you out of this, give you land filled with milk and honey, you're going to be freed and everything is going to go well." What immediately starts happening with them? The first time that Moses talks to Pharaoh, what happens? Pharaoh's reaction was, "You guys have too much time on your hands. We need to turn up the heat." So now Pharaoh says that he wants the same number of bricks, and Oh, by the way, you're not going to get any straw. You've got to figure that out on your own." The Israelites are being set up for failure. Imagine this. You're basically set up with unrealistic expectations and when you don't meet these unrealistic expectations, they're going to punish you and make your life harder. Imagine living under those circumstances. You don't have a positive outlook on life. This just wears you down.

Not only does this happen, even when the plagues start happening, the first three plagues happened to them as well. So what's their perspective? Moses has shown up, and promised all these positive things. Life has gotten harder, the Egyptians have turned up the heat, the Israelites have more pressure and more grief, and now the supernatural plagues are happening to them too. Perhaps they're saying, "I wish this God would go away! He's making life harder for us." You can understand why they would react this way.

The Bible tells us that this type of thing very much affected their ability to have faith and to hear what Moses was telling them. Please turn to Exodus, chapter 6, and we can see this very thing.

Exodus 6:1. *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh. For with a strong hand he will let them go, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land."*

2) *And God spoke to Moses and said to him: "I am the LORD.*

3) *I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name LORD I was not known to them.*

4) *I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, in which they were strangers.*

5) *And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant.*

6) *Therefore say to the children of Israel: 'I am the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.*

7) *I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.*

8) *And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as a heritage: I am the LORD."*

9) *So Moses spoke thus to the children of Israel; ... (NKJV)*

Notice the rest of this.

9b) ... but they did not heed Moses, because of anguish of spirit and cruel bondage. (NKJV)

In their minds, they couldn't believe this; they couldn't accept this because of their upbringing.

Now I will read verse 9 from the Revised Standard Version. I think the wording is clearer.

9) Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel; but they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and their cruel bondage. (RSV)

In other words, the harshness of their circumstances had broken them and they had lost heart. That's what we started off with in Luke, chapter 18. This happened to the Israelites because of the harsh circumstances they lived in. It just broke them.

Even now when God takes them out of this environment and He removes them from slavery, if you watch their behavior, it happens even when they're removed from their situation. They are still, in their minds, behaving like slaves.

You could understand through the first three plagues why they would be negative, because nothing good has happened yet. They've been promised all this good, but everything negative is happening.

The other plagues that take place happened to Egypt and not them. Then it starts becoming obvious that God is protecting them.

Then they are freed and the Egyptians basically give them their riches, just like God said it would happen. Of course, they are pursued by the Egyptian armies, but then God opens the Red Sea. Now we're getting pretty dramatic stuff here. They go through the Red Sea, and they watch Pharaoh's army being drowned.

Now they have witnessed a pillar of cloud and of fire, they had watched the sea being parted, and they watched all the plagues that took place. Now they are fed six days a week; food falls from the sky. On a daily basis they have miracles happening in their lives.

But if you notice, every time any type of adversity comes up, they say, "We should have stayed in Egypt, God brought us out here to kill us, there's no graves in Egypt, He's the mean and awful God and He's going to kill us with hunger. He's going to kill us with thirst." It's always, "We're going to die, and God's going to turn on us." This is what was in their heads. They believe God is because they've seen His acts. However, they are having real trouble believing that God is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. They're falling back on this all the time.

You see, God took them out of slavery, but they didn't take the slavery out of their minds.

When I read through this story, it reminds me of an old saying my grandmother used to say. My grandmother was born in Alabama and basically lived all of her life in the south. She would say it like this, "Son, you can take the girl out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the girl." She was talking about how a person's upbringing and experience makes a lasting effect upon them throughout their lives. That's kind of the concept that we are getting at here.

There's an important lesson we can learn from this whole situation with Ancient Israel. As we read before, not everybody had to die from that generation and not go into the Promised Land. There were two individuals who successfully made it into the Promised Land, but it's important to remember that they had the same upbringing and the same experience as everyone else. They and their past generations lived their lives in slavery through the same harsh circumstances, just like everyone else, yet their lives turned out much differently. There is something we can learn from that. Why was that? Why did Joshua and Caleb have a totally different reaction to this, and their lives turn out differently?

Turn to Numbers, chapter 14. This is where God starts addressing His punishment to Ancient Israel and how He will cause this generation to die in the wilderness.

Numbers 14:24. *But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it. (NKJV)*

He is pointing out what was different about Caleb. Caleb had the spirit of God in him. Not only did he have God's spirit, he was utilizing it, because you can see it in how he acts and how he lived his life. This made all the difference in him. He grew up in the same circumstances as everyone else. He lived in Egypt under harsh circumstances and his family went back multiple generations. Just like everybody else, that's all he knew, but Caleb responded differently.

We know that Joshua also made it into the Promised Land. While Numbers 14 doesn't point this out, turn to Numbers 27 and we will notice a comment that tells us the same thing about Joshua.

We're breaking into a totally different context which we're not going to address, but there's just one fact we want to pull out of this scripture.

Numbers 27:18. *And the LORD said to Moses: "Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit ... (NKJV)*

Caleb and Joshua both had the spirit of God in them, and this is what made the difference.

I love to point out that I'm a broken record when I say, "The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior." Let me explain a bit further what I mean by that.

Human beings tend to establish patterns. I'm not by any means saying that human beings can't change. We all have the ability to make decisions and change, but human nature is such that we tend to get into patterns of behavior. If human beings don't take great effort in seeking God's help to change those patterns, what we tend to do is continue those same patterns and will often continue to do the same thing over and over and expect different results. We tend to fall into those same patterns. That's why the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. It doesn't mean that it's a done deal, and people can't change. It just means that the most probable outcome is that they will repeat the patterns of what they've done in the past.

If we are utilizing the spirit of God, it gives a huge leg up in changing those patterns of behavior, in changing our thinking and how we live our lives. That's the whole point of why God gives us His spirit, it's to change. It can help us change our minds, our actions so we behave differently and we become more like Christ. We don't have to repeat our past patterns. However, if we don't utilize God's spirit, that is what will likely happen, that we will repeat the same patterns of our bad behavior.

It's important to realize, regardless of our background, the real battle that we are fighting is a spiritual one. That is very important to remember. Turn to Ephesians, chapter 6. Regardless of what our background, or education or personal experiences or where we lived, those things certainly play a role in shaping who we are and who we become in life. In reality, the biggest battle we fight is not a physical one. It isn't our background or what we've experienced physically or what talents or lack of talents we have, it is a spiritual battle.

Ephesians 6:12. *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. (NKJV)*

This is referring to Satan and his demons and the spiritual influence that they exert upon the entire planet, us included. If we are not fighting this through God's power, we are going to wind up repeating those same destructive patterns.

It's extremely important to realize what we are up against. Like previously mentioned, men should not lose heart, and should continue to pray. If we are not reaching out for God's power, to have Him help us, we fall into the mentality of, "I've been in the church for many years and I've understood the truth for decades. I know what I'm doing." So we start depending on ourselves.

If we're bringing a knife to a gun fight, we should expect to lose, because we're taking on an enemy that we have no chance of winning, and we are deluding ourselves. Just like the letter to Laodicea, you think you're rich and increased with goods and in need of

nothing, and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. This is a group that thinks they have it together. They think they have all they need to make it to the end, and they are depending on themselves. What does that mean? They're not reaching out to God to use His power, they're depending upon themselves, and that leads to delusion.

Turn to Job, chapter 41. It's important to realize what we are up against. In this chapter, God is talking to Job about Leviathan. Leviathan is Satan. Some misunderstand this and think that this is just a physical creature that God is talking about, and some think this is evidence of dinosaurs back in the time of Job.

If you read the last verse of Job 41, it says:

Job 41:34. ... *He is king over all the children of pride.*" (NKJV)

In Psalms, it refers to Satan as the serpent. Who is the serpent and the king of all the children of pride? Satan.

Job 41:8. *Lay your hand on him; Remember the battle—Never do it again!*
9) *Indeed, any hope of overcoming him is false; shall one not be overwhelmed at the sight of him?*
10) *No one is so fierce that he would dare stir him up. Who then is able to stand against Me? (NKJV)*

In this chapter, God puts a hook in Leviathan's nose and He uses him as a servant. God is saying, "I am way more powerful than him, but you don't stand a chance against him if you're taking him on by yourself."

This is what can happen to us if we're not reaching out and praying to God and getting His involvement in our lives. We started in Luke, chapter 18: men should not lose heart and continue to pray. We also saw through Ancient Israel, how harsh circumstances can wear people down and cause them to not want to listen or look to God and not have faith and trust in God because of our physical weaknesses.

We must understand this even though we're not in slavery like Ancient Israel was. However, we do live in very difficult times that can really wear us down.

Turn to 2 Timothy, chapter 3

2 Timothy 3:1. *But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:* (NKJV)

First of all, let's understand what is meant by perilous times. The Greek work for "perilous" is transliterated into English as "chalepos." It's Strong's number 5467. The Greek Lexicon by Joseph H. Thayer defines it as follows: *Hard to do, to take to approach, hard to bear, troublesome, dangerous, harsh, fierce, savage.* He's covering

all the different nuances and ways that this word can be used. However, if you look in Thayer's, those last three statements he makes, *harsh, fierce and savage*, he particularly connects with this scripture. He's saying: "In the last days, you're going to live in times that are harsh, fierce and savage."

2) *For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,*
3) *unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good,*
4) *traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,*
5) *having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! (NKJV)*

I think most all of us here in the U.S. and other western countries don't live in the type of slavery that Ancient Israel did, but we do live in very brutal times. We live in a Godless society that constantly bombards us with evil messages to basically delude and drain us of our faith.

I'm sure many of us have come from difficult, dysfunctional, and maybe abusive backgrounds where you may not have lived in slavery in the way the Israelites did in Egypt, but some have lived through backgrounds that developed a mentality of learned helplessness, or may have become very untrusting. You often find that people that have come from abusive or difficult backgrounds have difficulty with trust. Oftentimes as human beings, we tend to formulate our view of God from the authority figures we had when we were small children. Perhaps it's our physical father or our parents.

I remember years ago hearing a minister talking about working with the old Y.E.S. Program. Back in the days of Worldwide, we had the Y.O.U. Program for the teenagers, and for the little kids, we had the Y.E.S. Program. He was telling a story about how he was asking the Y.E.S. kids, "What is God like?" So the little kids were putting into words what their image of God was. Now a lot of their answers were kind of cute, but if you could listen to the descriptions, it was obvious they were describing their physical fathers. What happens is we tend to formulate our view of God, whether we realize it or not, around the authority figures that we've had physically in our lives. If that relationship was very negative, that can be a situation where we have trouble trusting in God. We believe that He exists, but the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him? If your experience was not one of someone who looked out for your best interest and there to help you and take care of you, but someone you had to be leery of, then we would tend to be leery of God.

Regardless of what those patterns are in our own lives, we can learn the lesson from Caleb and Joshua who grew up in that environment just like every other Israelite in Egypt, but because they had and utilized the spirit of God, their view of all of this was different. It wasn't just, "There's giants in the land." But, "Yes, there's giants in the land, but we've got God on our side. What are we worried about? God will deliver us and bring all this to us and it's all going to turn out well because we have God on our side."

What did everyone else see? “There’s giants in the land and we’re all going to die.” It was a very negative perspective.

We can allow that to suddenly wear us down. We started off in Luke, chapter 18, that it’s important that men not lose heart and continue to pray. What are we up against? A spiritual enemy that we are very outgunned against, that can absolutely destroy us if we allow it to happen. We must continually be reaching out to have that relationship with God to have Him in our lives.

What is the performance evaluation given to the Church of Laodicea, which is the church of our time? It is that you think you are rich and increased with goods and in need of nothing. You think you’re in a good situation. *You don’t realize you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked.* People that think they have it all together, are they regularly reaching out to God and asking Him to fix them? Why would they? As physical human beings, we tend to work off of a basic logic: If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it. We tend to think, “Hey, if I’ve got it all together, I don’t need fixing. I’m in good shape.” But if we are regularly asking God to help us, not only will that help us see our realistic condition, it’s going to give us the power to deal with that and to be able to break those patterns to live a life of faith where we don’t just believe that God is, but He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

There’s another important concept we need to see in James, chapter 4. Before I start reading this, keep in mind that James is writing to the church. The reason I say that is because if you begin in verse 1 in chapter 4, where it talks about wars and fights, what that is referring to is disputes. The spiritual concept can certainly be applied to wars as well, but he’s writing to the church. Church members weren’t literally killing each other, but the spiritual principle applies. He is talking about disputes in the church.

James 4:1. *Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? (NKJV)*

In other words, the spiritual battle that you’re fighting in your mind.

2) You lust, and do not have; you murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war, yet you do not have because you do not ask. (NKJV)

You’re not going to God and asking for His involvement in your life. You’re not continuing to pray and pray effectively.

3) You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you spend it on your pleasures. (NKJV)

That means, you’re not praying for God to fix you, you’re just asking for your selfish pursuits, and God is not answering that because it’s not in your best interest. He’s not going to hurt you with that.

- 4) *Adulterers and adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*
- 5) *Do you think the scripture says in vain, the spirit that dwells in us yearns jealously?*
- 6) *But He gives more grace. Therefore, He says, God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*
- 7) *Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*
- 8) *Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hand, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (NKJV)*

You see, this is all about a spiritual battle. Regardless of the physical circumstances of our life and how that may have affected and shaped us up to this point, we have to fight that battle through spiritual power. A key element in making that happen is being diligent in prayer.

We started out with losing heart resulting in slothfulness to duty, because if we start letting down and not involving God in our day-to-day lives, and not looking at life through His perspective in what we deal with day by day, what happens is we slide into being the generation that is faithless, that deludes ourselves into thinking that we have it all together, and we really don't.

We have to understand that we must stay diligent in praying, not just for knowledge or things that will solve our physical problems, but in solving our spiritual problems and overcoming our weaknesses and becoming more like God. We must rely upon God's power to see what we need to fix and receive the power to overcome.

The lack of faith is prophesied to be a major problem in our world today, not just in our society at large, but also in the Church of God. We don't have to allow that to be us individually. If we continue to not lose heart and to pray regularly to have God as part of our life, to seek His spirit and to respond to it, we can see that we won't fall into that problem ourselves. We can live the admonition that the Bible tells us repeatedly: the just must live by faith.