

Many are Called but Few are Chosen

First Day of Feast of Unleavened Bread

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Brethren, for all of us in the Church of God, the spring holy day season is a time of self-examination. This is a time we take a serious look at ourselves and evaluate ourselves against the example of Jesus Christ. We do this to identify the areas of our life—the faults, the sins, the leaven in our lives. The things our self-examination finds that are not in agreement with Christ's example are the areas in our lives that we need to do better at, to repent of, and to change.

The process of self-examination inherently can be uncomfortable for us. Quite frankly, at times it's downright painful. As physical human beings, we like looking at the things we do well. We like looking at the things we excel at—our successes. We like other people to compliment us and to point out what we do well. We're not big fans of having our faults pointed out. That's an unpleasant experience—to stop, to look at areas where we fall short, that we should feel bad about, and that we need to repent of doing. Changing is not a pleasant process, and, again, self-examination can be downright painful. However, we're commanded to do that with the very meaning of these holy days.

We live in a culture today that, frankly, teaches us the exact opposite. We live in a culture today dominated by the self-esteem movement, and by the political correctness movement. These movements indoctrinate us to be the polar opposite of everything the spring holy days are designed to teach us.

The self-esteem movement teaches us that the most important thing for us is to feel good about yourself. It is to accept yourself exactly as you are and realize that you are innately wonderful just as you are. You should never have to feel bad about that because that would give you low self-esteem. Self-esteem is put across as the most important thing.

We also have the political correctness movement, which tries to police our language. This is so that we never use words or phrases that might make anybody feel there was anything they might need to change or there is anything about him or her that requires repentance, or needs to be done better, or that is a shortcoming. Our whole society is dedicated to this type of view and indoctrinates us from every direction.

If we allow ourselves to absorb the values of our surrounding culture, those values will prevent us from being able to fulfill what the spring holy days teach us because the messages of these cultural values are the exact polar opposite of the holy day teachings. If we allow ourselves to absorb the values of our culture, two things will happen. One, we develop a delusional view of our own spiritual condition. Again, we'll think we're wonderful or innately good and we don't need to change anything. The other thing that will also happen is we will take those cultural values and in our minds

projecting those values upon God, upon His plan, and upon His standards. We will see God through the narrative that sounds good in our minds. What happens here is we will develop a delusional view of God and of His plan. What we have to learn is that instead of looking at a narrative of what sounds good to our emotions, we need to look at the evidence—the evidence of scripture.

What we will do today is look at this subject in light of what God commands us to do throughout these holy days. If you would like a title for this sermon, it is:

Many Are Called But Few Are Chosen

As I mentioned in the introduction, the holy days we are keeping with this Feast of Unleavened Bread are specifically about a time of self-examination. The reason being God named these holy days the Days of Unleavened Bread because the analogy of leaven teaches us important lessons. The Bible tells us that leaven pictures sin. The process of de-leavening—doing a thorough cleaning of our cars, our work areas, making sure we find all the leaven, get it out, and live without it for a week—is not merely a physical ritual. The self-examination process teaches us spiritual lessons—principles that we need to apply spiritually to our lives.

Let's start by noticing the Bible uses this exact analogy and tells us that leaven pictures sin. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 5, where we'll start reading in verse 1. As you turn there, I'll set the context. The apostle Paul writes this letter to the church at Corinth. The culture of the area around Corinth was extant with sexual immorality. One reason for that is the people practiced a pagan religion, and there were many local temples. Part of the worship service at these temples included visiting temple prostitutes, who worked out of the temples. It was considered an act of worship to go to the temple and have sexual relations with a prostitute. It was a normal part of their culture. You can imagine how this affects the entire area and how people think and view sexual relations and worship.

Paul writes to the congregation at Corinth because the situation there involved an individual attending services, who was involved in an adulterous affair with his stepmother. Concerning this arrangement, the congregation was taking the viewpoint of what we would call today "tolerance"—tolerance and acceptance. The Corinthians were aware of the situation and allowed this man to attend services. They were, frankly, proud of their tolerant accepting viewpoint of these circumstances. When Paul corrects the Corinthian congregation, their attitude becomes clear. In the process of correcting this, Paul teaches us an important lesson about leaven.

We'll start reading in 1 Corinthians 5, verse 1.

1 Corinthians 5:1. *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles — that a man has his father's wife!*

- 2) *And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.*
- 3) *For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) [concerning] him who has so done this deed.*
- 4) *In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,*
- 5) *deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*
- 6) *Your [glorifying] is not good.... (NKJV)*

Notice they were proud of their tolerant open-minded accepting attitude about this situation and that's why Paul chastises them.

- 6b) *... Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?*
- 7) *Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.*
- 8) *Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (NKJV)*

Clearly, Paul explains the meaning of the Days of Unleavened Bread here. Obviously, this letter was written near that timeframe as he says, "Let us keep the feast" in this manner. Paul explains the purpose and meaning of the spring holy days. Leaven pictures sin, and the lessons of getting sin out of our lives—identifying leaven and removing it from our lives. To do that requires that we identify what the leaven is. It requires we take an honest, detailed look at our own lives, comparing ourselves to the example of Jesus Christ. This is so that we will see the areas we need to change and we take action to get that leaven out of our lives.

Notice this. Turn over to 2 Corinthians 13:5.

- 2 Corinthians 13:5.** *Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. [Prove] yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless indeed you are disqualified.*
- 6) *But I trust that you will know that [you] are not disqualified. (NKJV)*

Notice here, Paul gives the instruction that we regularly need to be looking at ourselves, examine our lives so that we can see the areas we need to repent of and change to be more like Jesus Christ.

Paul mentions the concept of being disqualified. What Paul points out here is if we don't take this seriously and we don't exercise the principles taught to us by these holy days, we could lose out on salvation. We're not to beat ourselves up and think we'll never be good enough to be in the kingdom. However, it's an issue that if not taken seriously with diligent striving to overcome and remove the sins from our lives, God will not accept us in a lukewarm condition. That's one of the lessons of this sermon. I'll

explain this more later today, but we cannot look at the crown of salvation as a "participation trophy" because it absolutely is not. There are standards we must meet. And, we must be fully committed to this to obtain making it into God's kingdom.

Today, we live in a culture—as I mentioned earlier—dominated by the self-esteem movement and by political correctness, where the objective assures that everyone feels wonderful about themselves and is totally accepted exactly the way they are. No one ever has to hear the slightest suggestion that anything about them might be wrong and needs to be changed or that something about them could be sin that needs to be overcome, which maybe they should feel bad about because they need to repent.

Again, this is not just from the perspective of beating ourselves up, but being motivated to say, "This is wrong and I'm going to change it." That's a very important part of our Christian life. We live in a culture today that constantly tries to tell us we didn't need to do that. We just need to feel good about ourselves. If we accept this value system, we wind up developing a delusional view of ourselves. We also, then, naturally wind up projecting that idea upon God and develop a delusional view of God, His expectations, and His plan.

To illustrate what often happens in our society today I'd like to read to you a section from an article I pulled from a popular blog. If you have a Facebook account, you might be familiar with the name Matt Walsh. He's a popular blogger and oftentimes people post his blogs on Facebook and other social media sites, particularly among Church of God people. He's a Catholic individual and doesn't have the same doctrinal viewpoints that we do by any means. Oftentimes, when it comes to Judeo-Christian values on moral/social issues, Walsh often has a direct strong stance on moral issues similar to how members of the Church of God would look at those matters.

Also, keep in mind as I read this that if you're familiar with Matt at all, oftentimes, he has a sarcastic approach, and uses a lot of sarcasm in how he writes things. You'll notice that when I read part of this article and I'll even read it inflecting his style. The article I'm going to read to you comes from his blog. If you'd like to find it on the internet, it is themattwalshblog.com. Walsh posted this article on April 7, 2014. The title of the article is "Jesus didn't care about being nice or tolerant." What I'm going to read to you are only the first several paragraphs out of a longer article. To quote it:

There is no shortage of heresies these days.

If you want to adopt some blasphemous, perverted, fun house mirror reflection of Christianity, you will find a veritable buffet of options. You can sift through all the variants and build your own little pet version of the Faith. It's Ice Cream Social Christianity—make your own sundae!

And, of all the heretical choices, probably the most common — and possibly the most damaging — is what I've come to call the Nice Doctrine.

The propagators of the Nice Doctrine can be seen and heard from when any Christian takes a bold stance on any cultural issue, uses harsh language of any kind, condemns a sinful act, or fights against evil with force or conviction. As soon as he or she stands and says 'This is wrong, and I will not compromise,' the heretics swoop in with their trusty mantras.

They insist that Jesus was a nice man, and that He never would have done anything to upset people. They say that He came down from Heaven to preach tolerance and acceptance, and He wouldn't have used words that might lead to hurt feelings. They confidently sermonize about a meek and mild Messiah who was born into this Earthly realm on a mission to spark a constructive dialogue.

The believers in Nice Jesus are usually ignorant of Scripture, but they do know that He was 'friends with prostitutes,' and once said something about how, like, we shouldn't get too ticked off about stuff, or whatever. In their minds, he's essentially a supernatural Cheech Marin.

As I mentioned, you can see he uses sarcasm.

Yet, if you notice in today's world, you will see the Nice Doctrine put across even by those who profess to be followers of the Bible. It's very much the Nice Doctrine. It's, "Well, Christ wouldn't want to hurt anybody's feelings. He wouldn't ruffle anybody's feathers." If you think that, read Matthew 23, when Christ just blasts the Pharisees. He calls them "whitewashed tombs," "vipers," and "hypocrites." Christ uses very strong language.

Yet, this Nice Doctrine stems from the viewpoint of projecting the values of our culture onto God. We're taking the narrative that sounds good in our minds and that our emotions find comfortable. We project that onto God, creating a delusional image of who He is. The point I want to make here is that we, as Christians, cannot afford to fall into looking at a narrative. We need to look at the evidence, the evidence of scripture.

Let me explain why I keep using those words—"narrative" versus "evidence." I'll share a story to illustrate this. If you are old enough to remember the year 1995 and you were living in the United States that year, I'm willing to bet that you probably remember the O.J. Simpson trial. During that year, O.J. Simpson was arrested. He was charged with a double murder and he was put on trial for that. That trial wound up being broadcast live on national television as it played out for several months. As a result, it became a media circus. You couldn't turn on your television or open a newspaper or magazine without seeing some reference to the trial. So, if you were in the United States at that time, you probably remember that trial.

Over the last year, a television network produced a mini-series documenting the behind-the-scenes story of the whole ordeal in terms of this trial. Obviously, concerning how accurately the mini-series represented the entire story and how true or accurate that

documentary was, I have no idea. Yet, there was a scene in this particular miniseries, which, I think, illustrates this point very well.

There was point where O.J.'s legal team is sitting around discussing the case in a conference room. If you remember the story at all, O.J. assembled what was oftentimes referred to as the dream team as far as lawyers. He had some of the top attorneys in the country working together as a team to defend him. The way that the television network portrayed this scene—and, again, I don't know if this is technically accurate to what happened—they are, as I said, sitting in the conference room discussing the case. And, several of his attorneys bring up the fact that they are concerned about the mountain of forensic evidence the prosecution would present, which looks very incriminating. The forensic evidence painted the picture that O.J. was guilty. The attorneys were concerned what they should do to defend O.J. and deal with the forensic evidence.

The actor playing Johnny Cochran—and Johnny Cochran was the lead attorney on the case—he steps in and mentions to the other men there, "Guys, we don't need to worry so much about the evidence because you have to remember this. Oftentimes, it's not the evidence that sways a jury's decision. Oftentimes, the jury will choose the narrative that they relate to the most." If the narrative sounds right to the juror and they relate to personally and emotionally, that will oftentimes be what sways the decision in spite of the evidence. So, we don't need to worry so much about the evidence. What we need to focus on is telling a better story. We need to present a more attractive narrative and do a better job telling the story than the prosecution. That's our job."

If you remember how the trial ended, that strategy worked. Johnny Cochran's philosophy worked. The jury acquitted O.J. for the double murder charges. Now, he's in prison today for totally unrelated charges. Yet, Johnny Cochran's philosophy worked.

My point in mentioning this is that as human beings we tend to do exactly that. Sometimes we ignore the evidence—choose the narrative over the evidence. Particularly, if a narrative emotionally appeals to us and if it's attractive and sounds intuitively right to us, sometimes we'll go with the narrative and ignore blatant evidence right before our eyes. We need to remember what the Bible tells us there is a way that seems right to a man, but it ends in death. In other words, it sounds good; it feels good to us; intuitively our emotions say, "That's right," but it's not right. It's wrong.

And when it comes to understanding God, His plan, and His word, we cannot fall into following a narrative that sounds good to our emotions. We must follow what the evidence says—the evidence of scripture that's laid out for us in the Bible. If we do the opposite, we will wind up ignoring the evidence to follow a narrative that sounds good to our emotions.

As I mentioned, if we allow ourselves to fall into absorbing the values of the culture around us, we will wind up developing a delusional view of our own spiritual condition. We have to take into consideration the Church of God at the end time (I believe in the

time we are currently living), which is prophesied to have a delusional view of their own spiritual condition. Let's turn over to Revelation 3 to look at this. Revelation 3, we'll start reading in verse 14.

This is the letter to the Church at Laodicea. Many of you are probably aware the first chapters of Revelation record seven letters to seven different churches. One of the ways these seven churches can be understood is as representing historical eras; in other words, conditions during a particular period in history of the Church of God. It's not that everyone fits that exact description, but that's a general good characterization of that period of time. The last one at the end of six thousand years is the Church of Laodicea. I personally believe this is a very accurate description of the Church of God today.

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

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

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

Other translations say: *I am about to vomit you out of my mouth.* That's a graphic example, but it's exactly what the Bible is saying. I want you to think about the magnitude of what Christ said here. This is Jesus Christ saying, "I'm about to eject you out of the body because".... I know when you vomit (I know that's a graphic example but it's what the Bible says), what do you do? The contents of your stomach are ejected out of your body. What is the body of Christ? The church. This is the body called at this time to be a part of the Kingdom of God. Christ is saying, "You're in such a spiritual condition, I'm about to eject you out of here." What He's saying is that you're in danger of losing your salvation, just to be very direct about what He's saying. Now, pick up in verse 17.

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

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

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

In other word, this church has a lot to change. There is a lot they need to improve in their lives. Notice what their delusional perspective is. They think they don't need to change a thing. Continue in verse 20.

- 20) *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.*
- 21) *To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.*
- 22) *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.""*
(NKJV)

Notice even to this church as Christ tells the members they are in a horrible condition and on the verge of losing salvation, Christ still points out, "I'm here for you. If you're willing to listen, if you're willing to do your part, I'm here trying to help you. I'm knocking on the door, trying to get in." Notice Christ says, "If anyone hears me...." He, obviously, has expectations that most folks won't hear Him—by virtue of how He words this admonition.

I also want you to notice, as I pointed out here, this is a church with a delusional viewpoint of themselves because in their own opinion—to put it in modern-day terminology—they have high self-esteem. They feel good about themselves. "I'm rich and increased with goods and in need of nothing." They have a very high opinion about themselves and very high self-esteem. In reality, though, this viewpoint is a delusion.

Oftentimes when we think of the Laodicean example of being "rich and increased with goods, in need of nothing," what comes to mind many times is the example of the Pharisee and the publican in the temple. That's certainly one way this warning to the Laodicean Church could play out, but it's not by any means the only way this could play out.

With that in mind, let's turn over to Luke 18 and look at that example. Luke 18 and we'll start in verse 9.

Luke 18:9. *Also, He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:*

10) *"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.*

11) *The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men — extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.*

12) *I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'*

13) *And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'*

14) *I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be [abased], and he who humbles himself will be exalted."* (NKJV)

Notice first that the hero in this story is the person who was critically evaluating himself. He wasn't the person we would look at in our culture with the high self-esteem who felt he was so wonderful. No. It was the one saying, "Please be merciful to me because I'm not that great, but I'm trying." That man is the hero of the story.

I turned here because, oftentimes, when we think of Laodicean situation of "I'm rich and increased with goods and in need of nothing," we tend to think of the Pharisee, who had a very high opinion of himself, but he's also very condemning, attacking, and critical of others. The Pharisee is beating his chest. And, we oftentimes see this in our culture today as "I'm in the right group. We're the apple of God's eye and everybody else is scum." That's the type of approach, which is certainly a problem in the Church of God today. We can all think of individuals or even groups that take that particular approach.

Yet, we also need to recognize there is a different way to be in a Laodicean condition as well. That's certainly one way. In my opinion, it's not the most common way to fall into this condition. Think about our culture today. Our self-esteem culture takes the perspective of "I'm okay. You're okay. We're all okay. We're all just innately wonderful and we all should feel good about that. We should never say or do anything to make anybody ever feel bad about anything or that they need to change anything because we're all okay. It's all wonderful. Let's all feel good." Isn't that also, "I'm rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing?" Because "We don't need to change anything. We're all innately wonderful. We all just need to feel good about ourselves." Think about that. We can fall into that same thing.

What can happen through this world's approach is we can wind up having a delusional view of ourselves as well as a delusional view of God's plan. When we wind up taking this narrative and not just looking at ourselves through those eyes, we project it onto God winding up with a completely delusional view of God as well.

Think about how a concept has come into existence in the last decade or two in our culture today. In my memory, this didn't exist when I was a kid. What I'm referring to is what's oftentimes referred to today as the participation trophy. When I was in school there were competitions—athletic competitions, academic competitions, or various things we competed in as kids. And, oftentimes, trophies were associated with the competitions, reserved for those who did well. Trophies were reserved for, certainly, the top performer, but oftentimes, the top handful of performers. The purpose of a trophy was to reward the accomplishment of those who had worked hard, who had diligently applied themselves, or who excelled in a particular area. The trophy acknowledged and rewarded that work and effort.

What has happened since the self-esteem movement took over our culture is the idea of the participation trophy. Remember this is a culture that considers the most important thing is that you feel good about yourself—regardless of whether you performed in a way that caused you to feel good about yourself. The idea is, "We want everyone to feel like a winner regardless of whether they behave like a winner, whether they put in the work to be a winner. We just want them to feel good." Then, it becomes the participation trophy. Today one can receive a participation trophy by just showing up for the team, sitting on the bench, warming a seat, and doing nothing, not having put in the effort, worked hard, or done their part. "It's just we want everybody to feel good."

The problem is we can turn around and project this idea onto God and onto His plan. If there is one thing I want you to get out of this sermon, it is that the crown of salvation is not a participation trophy.

If you look at the crown of salvation as a participation trophy, you will lose that crown. The Bible repeatedly warns us about this. We have to take this seriously. It is not a participation trophy. We are not entitled to it. Yes, it is a gift; it absolutely is a gift. No one earns it, but there are standards we do have to meet. If we don't apply ourselves to do our part, we will lose that with weeping and gnashing of teeth. We must take that seriously.

As I mentioned, I used the example of a sports competition in obtaining a trophy. The apostle Paul uses this exact analogy to talk about our quest to obtain the crown of salvation. Turn over to 1 Corinthians 9 and we'll start reading in verse 24.

1 Corinthians 9:24. *Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.
25) And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.
26) Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.
27) But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. (NKJV)*

Put this into the context of who is saying these words. This is the apostle Paul. This man wrote more of The New Testament than any other single person did. This man was an apostle, who performed miracles through God's help. You might say he's a poster child—the superstar of the New Testament. Paul says here, "I take this very seriously. I run with that kind of diligence because I could lose out." Paul is not looking at this as a participation trophy. Paul looks at this as something he must be committed to making the most important thing in his life in order to be able to obtain this trophy.

Again, in using this analogy, let me make one important distinction. Paul mentions here that all of them run but only one receives the trophy. We have to understand that with the crown of salvation, it's a little different. It is not a matter that there are a limited number of crowns and you're competing with the person next to you to obtain it. That's not how it works. God has enough crowns for everybody. Yet, God does have a set of standards He expects us to meet to obtain that crown. As many as are willing to play by his rules and to make this the most important thing in their lives, God has a crown for them. He will deliver that. There are not a limited number of crowns. God's objective is to have every one of mankind be a part of this. That's God's desire but that doesn't mean that's how the movie is going to end. God knows there is a significant number of people that won't be in the Kingdom of God. We'll get to that point.

What we have to realize is we have to do our part. As I keep saying, it is not a participation trophy. We cannot look at this as an entitlement or think because "I was

called and I've been showing up, warming a seat for all these years. Well, I'm entitled to a crown. Right?" No, that's not how it works. We have to do our part. We have to be making ourselves ready. Turn with me over to Revelation 19:7.

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.*

9) *Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God." (NKJV)*

Notice in verse 7, the scripture makes a point about "the bride making herself ready" and also refers to the "righteous acts of the saints." Please understand I am not in any way insinuating that we earn salvation. Alternatively, that we can do so well that we can stand before God and say, "I deserve it. Give it to me." That never happens. As we pictured a few nights ago keeping the Passover, we had to have a savior to cover our sins to give us the gift of the opportunity to even start this race. No one even gets into the race without a savior. There is nobody who can stand before God and say, "I did so well. I deserve it. Give me my prize." It isn't happening because nobody deserves that. It is a gift.

Still, we should never delude ourselves into taking the Nice Doctrine and thinking, "God is so nice He wouldn't deny anybody. The Bible says, 'God wants everybody to make it.' So, He's such a warm, fuzzy feel-good guy, He'll just accept whatever because He wants everybody to feel like a winner. He wants them all to have a participation trophy." No, He doesn't. That's a narrative. Let's follow the evidence. The narrative is not what the evidence says.

We have to realize that there are standards we have to meet. It's not a situation of "I've been coming to services all these years. I have my regular seat. Everybody knows I sit there. I show up for services. I de-leaven my home for the Days of Unleavened Bread. I fast on Atonement. I pay my tithes. Isn't that good enough?" No. Let's notice an example where the Bible clearly says that.

Turn with me over to Matthew chapter 5. We're going to read verse 20 where Christ addresses the Pharisees, who were the religious leaders in Israel then. The Pharisees were well known for their strictness in performing the physical acts of obedience. They almost turned the Sabbath into a god itself in terms of their strictness in the things they did. In fact, they were famous for adding their traditions on top of God's law. If you look at it from the standpoint of "Hey, I keep the Sabbath and the holy days. I'm there every time we meet. I show up. I de-leaven. I fast on Atonement," the Pharisees did too. They were very strict on those physical things. The Pharisees weren't truly de-leavening their heart and changing who they were as people. Yet, in terms of going through the basic physical acts, yes, the Pharisees did those diligently. However, notice what Christ says here in Matthew 5:20.

Matthew 5:20. *For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. (NKJV)*

In other words, Christ says, "There is a standard here that the religious leaders are not meeting." Yes, they show up every Sabbath. They go through the physical rituals. They pay their tithes. Christ even said, "You give tithes on mint, anise, and cumin. You are very detailed and meticulous in some areas, but your heart is not right. You are not changing who are as a person. You are not truly de-leavening your lives. You're only going through the physical rituals."

We must realize this by learning and exercising the principles these holy days picture for us. It's not just an issue of "I showed up and warmed a seat for decades now. Doesn't that entitle me to a crown?" No. No, it doesn't. We have to take this seriously and apply it to our lives. Otherwise, we truly could lose out on our crown.

Consider one of the ways we can be guilty of the Nice Doctrine in the Church of God. Oftentimes, we don't take it from the standpoint of God will throw away His Law and He will accept same-sex marriage, homosexuality, etc.—those things we see in popular religion today. We typically don't go that far, but is common—and I've heard this many, many times throughout my life in the church, attending since birth. Oftentimes, it's looked at like "Just about everybody makes it into the kingdom. Right? Yes, there is a lake of fire, but only one half of a percent of the people go in there. It's just the most heinous, just the worst. Everybody else just slides right in." That is not what the evidence tells us. If we read through the Bible, very clearly, dogmatically and repeated, God's word warns us that there is a significant attrition rate. I'm not suggesting by any means that I know what that number is. I don't believe the Bible tells us. Yet, this is a warning to get us to take things seriously. Oftentimes, we look at our calling from the standpoint of turning the crown of salvation into a participation trophy. I've known a few people in my life that go to the extreme and this is very rare.

Most people in the Church of God recognize there is a lake of fire that exists for a reason, and, at least, some people will wind up in that lake because the Bible directly states that. I have heard some church members state this viewpoint: "God is just so nice. That won't happen. There won't be anybody in the lake." The more popular idea is, "Only the tiniest percentage of people will go in the lake of fire—1.5 percent, 98.5 percent make it in." That's not what our Bible tells us. Again, it's repeated and dogmatic and throughout the New Testament. Let's look at it. Turn over to Matthew 7 and verse 13.

Matthew 7:13. *"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14) Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (NKJV)*

Frequently, people look at this particular scripture and view it from the standpoint that we know God only calls a small percentage of mankind as firstfruits and the rest of mankind will be called later. That is absolutely a truth, which is easy to back up from the Bible. Taken in context, along with the scriptures we'll read after this, we simply can't brush this away by the statements Christ makes.

He talks about the narrow gate. Remember that terminology and turn over to Luke 13, where Christ tells us more about the narrow gate. As we start to read in Luke 13, notice first of all, the question that Christ is asked. When we look at the question and how He answers it, Christ paints a sobering picture for us. It behooves us to take this seriously. Luke 13:22.

Luke 13:22. *And He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem.*

23) Then one said to Him, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" ... (NKJV)

Please notice the question. The question is not, "Lord, are there just a few being called ahead of the rest of them? Are there just a few being called at this time and everybody else later?" Of course, we know that's true, but that isn't the question. Let's read the answer. The way Christ answers the question makes the definition of "saved" very clear. The definition of saved is making it into the Kingdom of God and that's blatantly obvious from the way Jesus answers the question. Start in verse 24.

24) "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, ... (NKJV)

Notice, we're talking about that narrow gate again, the one that leads to life.

24b) ... for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.

25) When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,'

26) then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.'

27) But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, [who] you are Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.'

28) There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out.

29) They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God.

30) And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last." (NKJV)

Oftentimes, many people look at this section of scripture from the standpoint that Christ just says only a few are called now and many others are called later. Let's ask a logical

question. How does being called later equal "being thrust out of the Kingdom of God with weeping and gnashing of teeth"? Think about it.

What do we call the gospel? The gospel of the Kingdom of God. Why? Because the good news is everyone gets a chance to be born into the Kingdom of God. Yes, there are those that are called first and those that are called later, but the Kingdom of God is the reward for everyone. That's the parable of the workers in the vineyard. Those called early in the day, those called throughout the day, and those called later in the day—they received the same reward. What is the reward? Being part of the Kingdom of God.

How would being thrust out of the Kingdom of God with weeping and gnashing of teeth equate with you just got your chance a little bit later than other people? It doesn't logically add up. The question is, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" Christ's answer talks about people who want to get into the Kingdom of God but won't make it into the kingdom and, instead, with weeping and gnashing of teeth will be thrust out. Follow that phrase "weeping and gnashing of teeth" through the Bible. You will see it two ways—"weeping and gnashing of teeth" or "wailing and gnashing of teeth." These are references to the lake of fire. The context makes that very clear. Here is the short version of Christ's answer to the question, "Lord, are there few who are saved?," "Yes, sir, you are correct. There are few that are saved." That's what Christ said. This concept is repeated again and again and again.

Turn over to Matthew chapter 22 where we'll see another parable that addresses this particular subject. Matthew 22, we'll begin in verse 1.

Matthew 22:1. *And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said:*

2) *"The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, (NKJV)*

As a side note, Matthew uses the term "Kingdom of Heaven." It's unique to the book of Matthew, if you search that particular phrase. However, it's obvious Matthew refers to the Kingdom of God. It's the same terminology because there are a number of accounts where Matthew uses the term "Kingdom of Heaven" when compared with similar accounts recorded in Mark, Luke, and John, they use the term "Kingdom of God." It's the same thing. Matthew simply uses a different phrase. Verse 3:

3) *and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come.*

4) *Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.'"*

5) *But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business.*

6) *And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them.*

7) *But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.*

8) *Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy.'*

9) *Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.'*

10) *So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.*

11) *"But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment.*

12) *So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless.*

13) *Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*
(NKJV)

Again, the reference to "weeping and gnashing of teeth;" if you follow that phrase through the Bible, it's clear what that is about. Verse 14:

14) *"For many are called, but few are chosen." (NKJV)*

This is where I pulled my title for this sermon from—directly word for word out of the scripture.

If you think about this parable, it's not hard to figure out what Christ talks about here. How did He start? "The Kingdom of God is like" In other words, what is He describing? He's describing the Kingdom of God. The king here is, obviously, God the Father. There is His Son, Jesus Christ. And, God (the king) is calling a wedding. Whom does the Church marry? Jesus Christ. A straightforward picture here. And people are invited to the wedding.

At the end of the parable, we have the phrase, "Many are called, but few are chosen." Oftentimes, this is looked at from the standpoint of "Well, again, He's surely just saying that there are only a few are called at this time. That's all it's getting at." Wait a minute. "Many are called." This can't be talking about those who aren't called because it talks about those who are called. That's the very definition. Think about it. What is the definition of receiving an invitation to the Kingdom of God? That's when God opens your mind and gives you an opportunity to respond and to receive the holy spirit—that's your calling. We all understand what that means. We oftentimes have difficulty with verse 14 because it's sobering. That's a scary picture to think that there could be a significant attrition rate.

A number of years ago, I was having a conversation with a church member I knew about this particular scripture. This man looked at me and said, "This can't be true. The idea of what you're saying just can't be right." I asked him, "Why is that?" He

answered, "A loving God would just never do that." In fact, this man presented it this way. "If God thought there would be a significant attrition rate of people who didn't make it," he said, "God wouldn't have even gone down the road of creating mankind. He would never do that if He thought it was going to end badly."

I was purposely a bit sarcastic in my response to him just to try to get him to think. I responded like this. I said, "So, what you're telling me is a loving God would never even consider doing something like creating a class of angelic beings—like millions, if not billions of them. Then, later have to turn around, due to the rebellion of a sizeable portion of them, and throw an entire one-third of them in the lake of fire. God would never do that because then He wouldn't be a loving God. Are you sure about that?"

I used that particular example because there is nothing speculative about that example. We obviously don't know the exact number of angels God created, but it is obvious from the Bible that number is well into the millions, if not billions of angels. And, the Bible states for us very clearly—and it's easy to prove—that when Satan rebelled, he convinced one-third of them to follow him. When you put Matthew 25 and Revelation 20 together, it's obvious God has determined the fate of that rebellious one-third of the angels. They will be thrown in the lake of fire. It's not a logical argument to say that a loving God would never do something like that.

The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. I say that all the time. I certainly don't mean by that that people can't change. That's the whole purpose of conversion and receiving the holy spirit—to have the power to change our behavior. It's just that we as human beings tend to follow patterns. If we don't utilize that strength from God, we tend to keep doing the same thing over and over again. That's our pattern.

If you're dealing with an individual who makes a big point of saying, "I am the Lord. I do not change. I am the same yesterday, today, and forever," that means His past behavior is an extremely good predictor of His future behavior. It's not a logical argument to say, "He would never do something like that with any significant attrition rate, because that just wouldn't be Him." Note He's already on record for quite the opposite.

Let me explain some other things. There are the terms here "many" and "few." If you look up the meaning of the Greek words, the definitions will tell you that "many" is a really big number and "few" is a significantly smaller number. Again, I'm not suggesting exact percentages or anything of that nature. Also, remember to consider these terms in context. Think of this in terms of whether you have a large or small home versus a large or small automobile. Those items use the very same words but have different meanings depending upon the context in which they are used. Your small home is still much bigger than your large automobile in terms of the context.

In terms of the "many" that are called—those given an opportunity to be a part of the Kingdom of God—we know who those people are. Ultimately, that will be all mankind

because that's the purpose God created mankind—to offer them an opportunity to be part of the Kingdom of God. That's the purpose. So, we know who the "many" is.

In terms of the "few," obviously, from the terminology and, again, the repeated warnings throughout the Bible about this, a sizeable difference exists between these two numbers. I'm not suggesting for a moment that I know what those percentages are or that the Bible says. To follow this concept, think about it in terms of the Parable of the Ten Virgins. What does that tell us? The Kingdom of God is like ten virgins on their way to a wedding. And, how does the story go? Five of them are successful; five of them are not. I'm not trying to say that it's a 50-50 split. Understand that I don't think that's the point of that parable. We're not trying to say exact percentages.

Yet, again, notice the Bible repeatedly warns: "let no one take your crown;" "he who endures to the end shall be saved;" "he who overcomes shall be saved." This also means those who don't do those things will not be saved. Just follow the logic. Why would you repeatedly warn people to take seriously the admonition not to lose their crown if it's a participation trophy that as long as we're warming a seat, we're good? It doesn't work that way. We must be diligent in placing this first in our lives.

Also, notice the other lessons in this particular parable. There is only one category of people mentioned that seized His servants and violently killed them. The others invited to the wedding didn't take it seriously. They turned their backs on it or it wasn't something they wanted to pursue. Then, there was the man who thought if he just warmed a seat on the bench that he could show up and it would all be okay. He sticks out and shows up, but the king tells him that he isn't wearing a wedding garment and instructs his servants to throw that man in the lake of fire.

The point is we need to make sure we're putting God absolutely first in our lives. Think about it. What's rule number one? "You shall have no other gods before me." He takes that one seriously.

Notice we have a similar account over in Luke 14. We'll start reading in verse 15.

Luke 14:15. *Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!"*

16) Then He said to him, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, 17) and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.'

18) But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.'

19) And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.'

20) Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.'

21) *So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.'*

22) *And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.'*

23) *Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. (NKJV)*

But, notice verse 24.

24) *For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.'" (NKJV)*

In other words, those that wouldn't diligently take it seriously and place it first in their lives will be excluded. Notice we don't even have the category of those who seized his servants and violently killed them. We just have many people who thought many other things in their lives were much more important than pursuing God and His invitation. They had various things they put before God.

What did they violate? Commandment number one—"You shall have no other gods before Me." He insists on being first. The Kingdom of God must be the pearl of great price, the thing that we're willing to give up all that we have to obtain it, the pearl that the man sells everything he has so that he can obtain it. Alternatively, the man that finds buried treasure in a field and gives everything he has to get the cash together to buy that field because it's more important than anything else in his life is. That's what the Kingdom of God has to be to us.

Sometimes we delude ourselves into thinking, "God's too nice for that. God wouldn't exclude somebody just because that person didn't put Him first in his or her life. Would He? Isn't He just too nice for that?" Let's keep reading, Luke 14 verse 25.

Luke 14:25. *Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them,*

26) *"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.*

27) *And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.*

28) *For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—*

29) *lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him,*

30) *saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'*

31) *Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?*

32) *Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace.*

33) *So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. (NKJV)*

Christ can't be any clearer about this. He's saying, "This has to be the first priority in your life. It's has to be the most important thing you strive for diligently. God understands we're human, we're carnal, and we're going to make mistakes. That's why we have a savior in the first place. We do have our weaknesses. We all fall short and without that sacrifice to cover our sins, none of us has a shot in the world. Again, God's point is that He will be there to help us, but He insists that we go about making ourselves ready. He insists that we place Him first in our lives. He repeatedly states throughout the Bible that if we don't put Him first, we have violated the criteria and we will be excluded.

Again, it's a nice sounding narrative to say, "He's just so nice. He wouldn't do that." That is a narrative. That is not what the evidence states. The evidence is what scripture directly says to us.

Turn over to Luke 9:57, where we'll see this same concept. Again, it's very directly stated. There's no mistaking it if we just read the words on the page and follow the evidence—not the narrative that sounds good to our emotions. Verse 57:

Luke 9:57. *Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go."*

58) *And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."*

59) *Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."*

60) *Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God."*

61) *And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house."*

62) *But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (NKJV)*

Again, you will find this concept all throughout the New Testament. Our calling has to be the most important thing in our lives and we must diligently take this seriously or we could lose salvation. The gospel writers included the analogies of the pearl of great price and the field with hidden treasure that the man bought to emphasize this point. Doing these things says that you are willing to forsake everything else to pursue God's kingdom. And, you wonder, "Would God really be strict on that? Would He really require that?" Think about it. The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior.

What does Genesis 22 tell you? "Abraham, you know that son that you waited twenty-five years for, that you finally have now and he's grown up? Take him to the mountain and kill him for Me. I want to make sure I'm more important to you than anything else." Then when Abraham is ready to do just that, what does he hear? "Stop. You've gone far enough. Now I know. Now I know what your heart is because you've proven it through your actions."

God must be most important in our lives and we must be willing to forsake all others—mother, father, sister, spouse, your own life. You're willing place God as the number one priority in your life. Think of it. It's rule number one—"You shall have no other gods before me." God is serious about that. He really means that. This is not a participation trophy. It's something that we have to take seriously.

We have to be sure that we exercise the principles of these holy days and, again, not look at this from the perspective of "Well, I warm a seat. I clean my house. I threw away the bread." Yes, that's great. You should have done that, but more importantly, we should look seriously at ourselves to identify the sin in our lives so that we are always actively overcoming. We're never going to be in a situation where we can say, "I'm there. I've arrived. I deserve salvation now." No. We have to have a savior. We have to have forgiveness and we have to have the help of God to get through it. Nobody ever earns that.

Still, we have to take this very seriously and not let the culture around us influence us to think, "Hey, we should all have high self-esteem, feel good about ourselves. And, God's so nice He couldn't reject anybody. He wouldn't turn anybody away and throw them in the lake of fire simply because they wouldn't place Him first in their lives." Yes, He would because the Bible repeatedly states it dogmatically, numerous times. Sometimes we tend to gloss over it because what are we seeing? The world's narrative, the narrative that sounds good to us but doesn't necessarily follow the evidence.

Understand I'm not trying to paint a picture here of this angry vengeful God who is just looking for the opportunity to squash people. That is not the case at all. Again, there are standards God expects us to take very seriously, but God is not at all against us. Please understand that.

Turn with me over to 2 Peter 3, verse 9.

2 Peter 3:9. *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (NKJV)*

In other words, God is not anxiously waiting to see whom He can squash and eliminate. That is not the case at all. God wants everybody to make it. His desire is for everyone to make it. Yet, God is not going to take our free moral agency away from us. God will require us to do our part in the process. Don't take this sober warning to mean, "God is

against me and He's not here to help me." No. Even to the Church at Laodicea notice He says He is standing at the door and knocking. If you'll just open the door, He'll come in and work with you. He'll help you through this, but you have to do your part. This is not a participation trophy and you do have to do your part.

Think about it from the standpoint of how invested God is in our success. As you think about this sober warning, also think of the entire picture. God created mankind for the purpose of reproducing Himself in order to create a big family. That is the entire idea for all of this. As I mentioned, that required a savior. Literally, one of the two God-beings in existence came to earth, gave up omnipotent status (where He could not feel pain or have to face adversity as we understand it), suffered, was humiliated, was beaten and killed solely for our benefit. That's invested. That's seriously invested.

However, also think about the amount of planning that went into this. God created mankind for the purpose of offering us salvation. That was the point. Have you ever wondered why God waited four thousand years to send Christ to earth to be the savior that would enable salvation to be a possibility? Why wait that long? Why not just do it on the front end? Think about it. All that played out during timeframe also included the Old Covenant with Ancient Israel. Also, think about how interesting that one is. The whole purpose of creating mankind was to offer salvation, an opportunity to be in the Kingdom of God. That was the point in creating mankind.

So, God creates mankind and thousands of years pass. Then, God offers a physical covenant to a physical people and salvation isn't even on the table. Why would you do that? Turn to 1 Corinthians 10. I'm going to skip over the first several verses here. You're probably familiar with this. Paul mentions a number of events that happened with Ancient Israel during their journey to the Promised Land and various things recorded in the Old Testament. Notice verse 11.

1 Corinthians 10:11. *Now all these things happened to them as examples, ... (NKJV)*

We're going to come back to that. These happened for that reason.

10b) ... and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. (NKJV)

Please note Paul didn't say, "God wrote all this down for the benefit of all of you who would be called later." Paul said, "All these things happened for this purpose." It was orchestrated. This was a training exercise. God worked on this for thousands of years so this could be written down. So, He developed a manual for us. So, when God began to call a significant number of people, He now has these training tools to give us to help us succeed. All these examples, admonitions, and instructions are available to us. These things were done before God significantly began calling people because God wants everybody to succeed. That's the point, also, for calling a class of trainers (the firstfruits) before God calls everybody else.

Thousands of years of planning and work went into this to set people up for success, giving them the tools and the opportunity to make it. God is heavily invested in His plan and deeply loves and cares for mankind and wants all of us to make it. That does not make the crown of salvation a participation trophy. There are still standards we have to meet. We must take our calling seriously. It has to be the pearl of great price.

When Christ said, "To be My disciple you must be willing to choose me over mother, father, brother, sister, spouse, your own life," Christ is serious. There are numerous examples of this throughout the Bible. That is what is required. Realize Jesus said, "It is the difficult way. Narrow and difficult is the way." This path requires persecution and suffering as Christ suffered.

It's a nice narrative to think that somehow most of us will escape that. That is not what the evidence says. The evidence directly states in 2 Timothy 3:12:

2 Timothy 3:12. ... all who [want] ... to live ... in Christ Jesus will [face] persecution. (NKJV)

Let's ask a simple question? Is there some other route to salvation? Is there some other route than the one described in the Bible? Is there somebody else who can save you? No. That means everybody faces persecution. Everyone has to suffer as Christ suffered.

It's the narrow and the difficult way, but the rewards are fantastic. It's Revelation 21:4. There's no more death. There's no more sorrow. There's no more crying. They are living in a utopia forever. But, to whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48). To receive that we can't just warm a seat and look at it as a participation trophy.

We have to be diligently applying this to identify the sin we have in our lives and to overcome. As long as our hearts are still beating, we must strive continually to overcome for the rest of our lives. We will never be perfect in lifetime. Nobody ever will be. Yet, we have to be fully committed to that. And, if we are, then the blood of Jesus Christ covers as the mistakes and sins we'll make in the process because we will fall down and we will make mistakes. We're fallible. Every one of us is fallible, but those sins will be covered. That way we can get through this physical life, get to the end and hear God say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

If we don't, what we will hear is, "I never knew you." And, we'll be thrown in the lake of fire with weeping and gnashing of teeth. We have to realize when the Bible tells us "Many are called but few are chosen" it means exactly that. Think about it.

This weekend being here with all of you, I've been in several conversations where people have talked about our calling. We talked about how God began working with us and how that process played out. We all understand exactly what a calling means. It

means when God opens your eyes and gives you that invitation to have an opportunity for salvation.

So, it's blatantly obvious when Christ says, "Many are called, few are chosen," that a good number of people won't take this calling seriously and they will wind up losing out.

What we need to do is take this very seriously and exercise the principles of these holy days in our day-to-day lives. We must make sure to do everything we can to be overcomers and we must rely upon God's strength to make that happen, because we can't do it without Him. Realize that God is there for us.

As Jesus Christ said even with Laodicea, "I'm so disgusted with these folks I'm ready to vomit them out. I'm still saying, 'If you will listen, I will help you. I'm here for you.'" What Christ says is this: "I set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. I'm urging you to choose life. I'm pleading with you to choose life. You will love how this ends. Yet, if you, through your behavior or neglect choose death, I will allow you that choice, but I will kill you. So, take that very seriously because your life is literally at stake." When we went into the baptismal water and made that commitment, it was literally a life and death covenant. It is that serious. And, we need to take our calling that seriously. Brethren, as we go through these holy days, study and learn the lessons of de-leavening our own lives, let's make sure we are diligent in doing our part so that we will be included in the few that are chosen.