

Are You on Solid Ground?

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Recorded on March 28, 2020

How often have you heard in recent days, maybe weeks, that we are living in interesting times? It seems like every time we turn around; somebody is making that statement. When you look at the conditions that exist in the world today, of course they are indeed, interesting times. The pandemic—the Covid-19 virus that is spreading around the globe—is stealing the headlines for the most part. It seems like there are even hourly updates, and the figures and the impact that this is having, not only on the people becoming ill, the people dying, but also on the economic conditions of the globe. The global economy is under stress to say the least.

How quickly things happen is such an amazing thing. Back in mid-February in the United States, the stock market was at an all-time high. Consumer confidence was high and going up and everybody was excited how wonderful things were going to be. Two or three weeks later we're in what they call a bear market situation and literally trillions of dollars, of what I call paper wealth, went up in smoke. Disappeared right off the face of the globe and people were standing around wondering what hit them. Driving to services, driving around you can now see the impact of the attempts to get a handle on it and try to contain the virus so it doesn't spread too terribly far or too fast. You have to know that there is something going on when you close down major sporting events. Stop and think about it, the 2020 Summer Olympics have been postponed for a year, the Masters Golf Tournament has been postponed, the Kentucky Derby, Major League Baseball, the National Basketball Association, the National Hockey League, college athletics—all of that has been impacted. Of course, with that, no crowds being allowed to try to minimize the opportunity to spread the illness, is having a serious economic impact as well.

Restaurants are closed, people are out of work and you can chronicle or catalogue numbers, one after another. Employment has been seriously impacted. Here in the United States, the week ending March 21, the number of new people applying for Unemployment Insurance was 3.28 million. That's four times the highest amount ever recorded. Not just equal to the most ever recorded, but four times. So, you have people unemployed. Central banks and legislatures are scrambling trying to come up with aid packages to try and hold off the total destruction of the economy and at least minimize the impact. We are in interesting times for sure.

People are faced with losing their jobs and if you're living pay check to pay check anyway, what do you have? You have the possibility of not making your rent payment. There is discussion now, about what happens to people if they can't make their electricity or water payment and the authorities start shutting things off—we can't just turn millions of people into the street. That in itself would be a public health issue. We live in interesting times.

At this particular time and this particular season, it isn't just current events that are on our mind as we are also approaching the Passover season. This Passover is at a time of such traumatic circumstances around the globe, in terms of economics and uncertainty and volatility, it is a good time for us, as we would normally do pre-Passover anyway, to pause and examine our own circumstances and where we stand. So, the title of the sermon is:

Are You On Solid Ground?

It is important for us as Christians, as individuals dedicated to serving our God and His firstborn Son, to be on solid ground. This is whether it's affluent economic conditions or whether it's sparse economic conditions. We have an obligation to serve our God and to do it as He desires us to, while considering the turmoil and the uncertainty that exists in the world and considering that we are now in the pre-Passover season again. The Passover will be kept in a way that we haven't kept it before, at least in this modern age; where everyone will be keeping it at home. We are not allowed to gather at all. We were planning to do a live presentation for Sabbath services at our hall in Post Falls, but Idaho has put on additional restrictions and they don't want us to have even four or five people together. So, we do the best we can with what we have and trust that if we are careful and make proper preparations, we should come through it in reasonably good shape.

What is the purpose of our Christian experience? How is it better or how does it give us some advantage over not being a Christian or over not being a servant of God? Now is a good time to be thinking about that as you look around the world and look at what's going on. People are not happy unless they are experiencing financial gain and not only having enough, but having more than enough—having plenty. This whole virus pandemic has put a big bite into those things which we use for entertainment. All the major efforts at reducing crowds and so forth has hit our entertainment industry. All of these sports and athletics and things we tune into for our enjoyment and entertainment have taken a pretty big hit.

What is the purpose of being a Christian? Is it to maximize our consumption in the world? Last week's sermon dealt a little bit with the health-wealth gospel. That is if you are prosperous you are a good Christian and if you are not a good Christian, then that is the reason you are suffering. This doesn't really reflect what the Bible actually teaches us. Is our whole purpose in life to ensure a comfortable retirement? I'm beyond retirement age now, closer to eighty than seventy. Therefore, I don't pay attention to all the efforts to get me to save for retirement as it's too late. I have to get by with what I have, which is adequate. Turn to Matthew 6 and begin to look at the conditions that exist in the world. As we approach the Passover, we can use the opportunity to examine our own situation and our own attitude. It's easy to point the finger at the world and say you people are sinners and need to repent. The purpose of the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread is to look in the mirror and point the finger at ourselves and take the time to make sure, if there are adjustments that need to be made, now is the time to make them.

In my experience over the years and the decades now, I have found it is a great benefit to us to be able to occasionally make minor adjustments, rather than have to face the judgement seat in one major fell swoop. It's good for us to make adjustments as we go along. Matthew 6:19 is the middle of the scripture known as the sermon on the Mount delivered by Jesus, early in his ministry.

Matthew 6:19 *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; (NKJV)*

So do not lay up for yourselves, treasure on earth.

20) but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. (NKJV)

Look at the global economy and the efforts to keep it afloat because it's under a great deal of stress. Has the effort, the emphasis on the global economy been to lay up treasure in heaven or to lay up treasure on earth? It doesn't take a rocket scientist to recognize that the emphasis has been on laying up treasure on earth. When moths and rust break in they take a certain amount of time to carry out their damage and their havoc on whatever holdings you have. Electronic “moths and rust” do it in a hurry. Trillions of dollars in paper value went up in smoke in just a matter of a few weeks. The horrendous impact on people who were putting their emphasis there and hoping their riches would grow and increase, suddenly found they were taken for a severe shellacking as they say.

So, what should we do? Where should our emphasis be? It's not that we shouldn't plan for the future or that we shouldn't develop the skills and such that make us employable and make us valuable to our employers. We can earn a living if you will. But we have to ask ourselves is the emphasis on the primary purpose of laying up treasures are which subject to the corruption, the mold, the decay that happens and even thievery if you will? The emphasis has to be laying up treasures in heaven because that's where real life comes from. That's where our treasure is protected and you don't have to worry about it. You put money in a bank and it's protected by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. But because of the efforts to keep the economy propped up, interest rates are practically zero. So, you can't even follow the admonition of scripture—why didn't you put my talent in the bank and at least draw interest which I could have received at my return. I can't even do that, with interest rates so low. Then you are encouraged to invest what you might have in something riskier to try and get some kind of a return.

21) For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (NKJV)

Those with big stock portfolios are worried sick—what do I do next, they ask? Our focus and attention must be on laying up treasures in heaven. There's a way to do that in our day to day lives. In the way we conduct our lives is how we can accomplish it.

Human society frankly, has been built on a foundation of sand. It has taken the approach of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It didn't want to receive instruction from God and so decided, to do it themselves and take the consequences. That's what is happening; we're suffering the consequences of having told God, we really don't need you, we can do it on our own. That's probably going to come back to haunt us. But in 1 Corinthians 15 there is good news. Which is of course encouraging in a time of difficulty and uncertainty, extreme volatility and the like. With 1 Corinthians 15, what do you think of? The resurrection chapter. Notice what it says.

1 Corinthians 15:1 *Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand ... (NKJV)*

Once again, do we stand on solid ground? What is the basis for our standing? Are we secure in where we are standing and where we are going?

2) by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. (NKJV)

Is it possible to believe in vain? Evidently it is. We have to understand truth, we have to understand what is being preached to us. Do we hold fast to it? It's easy to get all excited about pursuing the truth of God for a time and then lose our grip. There are parables about this. Because of the problems and difficulties that arise, the health-wealth gospel not working, and in spite of their attempt to do it God's way, things don't seem to go too well. There are still trials, tribulation and cares of the world. Hold fast, he says, to the word which I preached to you, otherwise you have believed in vain. We will touch on that a bit later as well.

3) For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: (NKJV)

Paul simply delivering that which he received and if you read the story, he received his understanding of the Gospel directly from Jesus Christ. Paul is often made an example because it was Christ Who gave him the Gospel. It was Christ Who gave the Gospel to the other apostles as well.

3 continued) ... that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures ... (NKJV)

That's the good news. In the context of the Passover, in the context of trying to achieve something beyond this temporal, physical existence, there is the importance of understanding why it was necessary for Jesus Christ to die. He says again that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. Somebody had to die, somebody had to pay the penalty. There is a penalty for sin. The penalty is death. If you're not going to do anything but just die, you have to be willing to accept the sacrifice, the price that was paid for you.

4) and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,

5) *and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.* (NKJV)

Paul then points out that there were hundreds of eye witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He says that's good news because it holds for us the promise of what's ahead for ourselves. That whatever happens in the life, whether we live in affluence and die peacefully without pain or whether we have to scrape by from day to day, trusting God for every meal. Or maybe we do so with some kind of debilitating, physical ailment. Either way—we all look forward to the same thing; Jesus Christ was resurrected. But if He wasn't resurrected, then of course we are in trouble because we aren't going to be resurrected either. What we actually face is interesting. We want to make sure that we are doing things the right way. Then it's good news.

We have this concept of Christ dying for our sins; let's pursue that a little bit. In John 3, the chapter begins with the Pharisee, Nicodemus, coming to Jesus and inquiring of Him. He wants to know certain things. It's interesting the conditions around which Nicodemus comes.

John 3:1 *There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.*

2) *This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him ...* (NKJV)

So, he came by night. Evidently, he didn't want to be seen going to Jesus to inquire of Him. But he is curious so he seeks Him out after dark.

2 continued) ... *“ Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”* (NKJV)

Notice, they evidently did not see Jesus as the Messiah, but still saw Him as a teacher from God. They were expecting something else when it came to the Messiah. Yet they could see from the fruit that Jesus was obviously someone special. So, Nicodemus came inquiring of Him. It's interesting what Jesus said in response to Nicodemus.

3) *Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* (NKJV)

Jesus was anticipating what was coming next, and the way Jesus responded. was probably a bit of a surprise to Nicodemus.

4) *Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? [How can this happen] Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?”* (NKJV)

Is that what Jesus is talking about? Clearly not, I think Nicodemus obviously knew that would not be the case, but he clearly didn't understand the implications of what it means to be born again.

5) *Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (NKJV)*

With this business of life—birth, life, Kingdom of God—there is something about the Kingdom of God that goes well beyond what we experience here in this physical existence we have. Compared to God, this physical, temporal life that we live in the flesh, is very temporal. It doesn't accomplish much on its own if we are not pursuing God's purpose. There is something to life well beyond this physical existence.

6) *That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (NKJV)*

There it is again, in the flesh—we have to go beyond that. Jesus came in the flesh, He was the Word, He came in the flesh and dwelt among us for the purpose of dying and paying the price for sin. He came to be sacrificed. John will say in the book of Revelation later—he will record—that the Lamb of God (Jesus Christ) was crucified from the foundation of the world. God knew from the very beginning that there would be a need for a sacrifice. You create angelic beings, they're not flesh. You create fleshly human beings and give them the option to choose—to obey or not obey, to serve God or not. It's a pretty sure thing some of them are going to misbehave and make the wrong decisions. They are going to choose to serve something else other than their Creator. So that which is born of the flesh is flesh—we're flesh and we see that as we go.

You see these various ads on television where there is a lot of attention paid to the young and the hearty and the vigorous. There will be ads for various kinds of exercise equipment and some hard bodied, young male or female on this machine. They're going crazy and really working at it and the little quip is, stronger every day. That can happen at a particular period in your life. I look over my seven and half decades and there was a time indeed where we were running fun-runs with our kids and were actually in training, running these 5k races, trying to get a new PR (personal record). We'd improve and then there comes a day when you don't improve. In actual fact, there comes a day where you never hit the personal record and you're going down and down and the further into life you get, it becomes about not improving the flesh on a day to day basis. There is a lot of effort put into self-improvement. The business of being a Christian, the business of being a child of God, the business of working toward being born of the Spirit is not about self-improvement. It's about transformation, it's about rebirth, it's a total abandonment of this fleshly existence.

Now the fleshly existence serves a purpose, it gives us an opportunity to learn to trust God and live by faith. I think we all recognize that it is required of us to live by faith. God expects us to live by faith. I find it very easy—you encounter a circumstance where you do not see a solution—that's the difference. You live by faith; you don't live by sight. You can't see the solution, you don't know the way forward, now you're being asked to live by faith. Often times, what we do is go to God and say, I don't see the answer, show

me something I can see. Time out—it's not about showing you what you can see, it's now about following Me and I will guide you, you will learn to live by faith.

So troubling circumstances in the world and the global economy and how that might trickle down to impact all of us and our various circumstances is curious. I'm standing here in our hall in Post Falls, recording this sermon. We went to all this trouble and we have all these lovely, comfortable seats, this wonderful kitchen and we can't even use it. What's the deal? Hopefully that will turn around and we'll return to normalcy at some time or another. We have to move beyond this fleshly existence.

7) *Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'*

8) *The wind blows where it wishes ... (NKJV)*

What does it mean to be born again, what does it look like? It looks like the wind.

8 continued) *... and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." (NKJV)*

That's the ultimate—that's what it means. Paul said to the Romans in chapter 1:4, I won't turn there, but it's instructive—Jesus Christ became the Son of God via the resurrection. That's how it works. That's the pattern whereby we too will become children of God. In this flesh, we become flesh, we learn to serve God, to live by faith, to live by His direction and guidance and the end process is to be born of the Spirit. It's kind of exciting isn't it? Real life—life eternal—is something beyond the flesh, beyond this physical existence and we have to look to God for that because we can't pull that off. You can't change yourself from flesh to spirit, that's something God alone can do.

9) *Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?" (NKJV)*

He didn't get it. Some people might respond, what difference does it make anyway? We've had that response as we were being led to a deeper understanding of pretty basic principles. What is more basic than the relationship between God the Father and His firstborn Son? What is more basic than how their relationship is portrayed in scripture; the record of God and Christ in scripture. Yet there are countless people that you thought were Christians—are they believing in vain? At what point do I cross the line and my belief becomes vanity? Because I have abandoned the proper approach to God and His way of doing things. How does this happen? What often times we encounter, as God begins to unravel the truth for us, is to see the scales begin to fall away from our eyes, the wax comes out of our ears, and we begin to hear and see and apply spiritual principles. In order to do that, it has to be revealed to us. That which is truly important is revealed. What was the response? How can these things be?

10) *Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?"*

11) *Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. (NKJV)*

Interesting isn't it? Here comes the witness, this is what we've seen and this is what we know and the knowledge of God isn't always well received. The knowledge of God can be quite disruptive to the ordinary lives of human beings. We are going along fine and then we begin to realize that God has something to say about how we live our lives, what we do and when we do it. It can be kind of disruptive.

12) *If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?* (NKJV)

There is a level and depth of understanding that goes far beyond what our five senses can take in. It is a spiritual thing and you have to be properly oriented in order to receive that guidance and understanding. Verse 13 is one of those eye openers that shook my Protestant upbringing.

13) *No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man ...* (NKJV)

That was something—like I said, that was an eye opener. No one goes to heaven? Really?

14) *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up ...* (NKJV)

Jesus was beginning to focus on the business of the crucifixion and His sacrifice and He's pointing this out to Nicodemus. You can see the wheels turning in Nicodemus' brain trying to sort out what Jesus is saying.

15) *that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.* (NKJV)

Now we're getting down to the real basis of this business of Christianity. There is a route, there is a way to achieve eternal life. There is something beyond the flesh, something beyond just the food and raiment of day to day existence, which leads to eternal life—real life, the life that God possesses. Verse 14 gives us the price of eternal life. The Son of Man had to be raised up, which is referring to His crucifixion. Verse 15 then, we have to believe.

15) *that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.* (NKJV)

So, we have the business of belief. What is it about believing in Christ's crucifixion that is so important? It isn't just an academic understanding; it says right there Jesus died for my sins, that's wonderful. What we have to do—the level and depth of belief that is required is that we recognize what Jesus did for us personally. That it was necessary for me. That if I'm going to have an opportunity for eternal life, I have to recognize the price which had to be extracted from Jesus Himself, for my benefit. Verse 16 is one of the most quoted verses in all the Bible.

16) *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (NKJV)*

The crucifixion wasn't something that happened to Jesus. If He had been more careful about where He was, when He was there and the things He said. If He had been careful about not offending the powers that be, He might have avoided crucifixion. No, He came for that purpose. *God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

17) *For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (NKJV)*

We have to believe that He died for our sins. We can't just hide in the crowd and in the safety of the crowd say yes, Jesus Christ died for our sins. No, He didn't die for our sins, He died for your sins, He died for my sins. That is the part of belief that is so important. We have to personalize it, recognize that we have come far short of the standard that God intends us to meet. Jesus Himself said, become you perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect. That's a pretty high standard; bring that one to mind next time you want to compromise what you know to be the will of God.

18) *“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (NKJV)*

He doesn't believe in what that Son of God, through His sacrifice, has done for him and for us and what has been possible for you and me to do. That's what unbelief is. I don't believe it has any affect. The result, the alternative is not good, it's not savory.

19) *And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. (NKJV)*

If God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, then why is there so much suffering? Why is there so much downright nastiness in the world? He explains it right here in verse 18, again.

18) *“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

19) *And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. (NKJV)*

You hide in the dark. Nicodemus came to Jesus in the dark. There's probably more than just superficial meaning there.

20) *For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.*

21) *But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.” (NKJV)*

It's interesting that we have the opportunity to pursue and actually achieve eternal life. It is important that we look at our circumstances and have opportunities to pursue and move forward and do the right things. We need to be about it and be grateful that we have the opportunity. Think about it. In this pandemic thing, there's the discussion that we're trying this strategy and that strategy so we can save lives. The actual fact is that medicine and all the developments that we have had in modern medicine and the like, has never saved a single life—not a one. True enough, through medical intervention it is possible for a human being to continue living and breathing for another day, a week, a month, a year or whatever. That's not the kind of life that God is referring to and that Christ says is achievable if we will believe and put ourselves and our trust in God's hands.

I'll use my own experience to illustrate the point. Without medical science and intervention, I'm twice dead. Once from prostate cancer which certainly would have taken me out by now. Eight years ago, we were watching it, then it became aggressive so we had to do something. By the immediate and aggressive doing something, here I stand today. So, I have a little extra time. Fifteen, sixteen months ago, I had this coronary issue. Turns out I have coronary artery disease. I have two stents and a third probably required before too long. Because we have monitored it and kept up with it, I've been given a little extra time. Ask yourself, do you have an extra day? What are you going to do with it? What will we do with our extra day?

Think about what takes place—we get these weekly updates and a lot of times they revolve around people with really serious health problems, maybe it's elderly people and maybe not. People are suffering. Have you ever thought, I've been praying for that person not for weeks or months, I've been praying for them for years and they're still not healed? What's the deal? What's God trying to do? Doesn't He hear my prayers? You can quote James 5; the fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Maybe I'm not fervent enough. Maybe the truth is, I'm just not righteous enough so God doesn't hear because of that. You can second guess the whole thing, but one thing I've learned over the years, we want to sympathize with people that are hurting. That's a natural thing to do. They're suffering with ailments and in pain and their lives have been greatly impacted. They've had to adjust to being physically impaired. They are seriously afflicted. We want to be compassionate and have proper sympathy for them. What we have to do, perhaps more than anything is to put ourselves in God's place. Not so much in the person who is afflicted, but in God's place. What does God see? It's God that is working out His work in the lives of all of us. What is God accomplishing; why does He allow this?

There comes a time when you have to set aside the “why” and ask yourself what is the proper response here? As was pointed out last week, Peter said don't think it's strange

concerning the fiery trial that comes upon you. We suffer the same things that everybody else suffers. Have you noticed that? When you've been through a certain trial or test of one thing or another—could be financial or health or any number of other things. You make it and go through it and then encounter someone else that has troubles and is suffering trials. Then we indeed have a good deal more compassion for those who are suffering. We are less likely to judge them. We could say, "you know if you would take better care of yourself, you wouldn't get sick"—look in the mirror and then say that. That is certainly the case for me. I've had my issues and will probably have more as time goes on. Therefore, we don't judge people, we don't look down our noses at one another. We should be helping and encouraging one another as we pursue this course that God has set us on.

Some time ago, anybody who had the responsibility to speak from time to time was always scratching about for subject matter and every now and again a thought would come and I'll write it down. Some time ago I wrote down some notes and I have them listed. Here is the thing about sin. I thought I had better write this down lest I forget it because some day I might want to use this material. Today I am going to use it. Here is what I noted. This goes back years but I think it is pertinent to the time today, especially with Passover season coming.

Looking at the two trees, going back to Adam and Eve and God's first instruction to humanity—the very first instruction—what did He say? He said, "In the day that you eat thereof (speaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) you shall surely die." He did not say, I will surely kill you. He said you will surely die. There is right and there is wrong. God is gracious enough to point out the difference and explain the consequences which don't require God to take a stick to us every time we make a wrong move. God doesn't have to run around with a stick and whack us every time we make a mistake. The consequences of our ill-gotten behaviors and thoughts and so forth will give us understanding, if we are alert to it in some degree or other.

Intent is critical. Evil thoughts lead to evil deeds. It is better for the potential victim if all you do is think evil of them. Somebody thinks evil of me—that's fine as long as they don't do me bodily harm or steal my precious goods or whatever, I'm not too concerned about it. You might have a situation where you have these thoughts going through your head and you're thinking evil of somebody, but at least you don't do them any harm or damage so that the potential victim is not harmed. But you are in sin's grip for your evil deeds or your evil thoughts. It is a critical situation.

Jesus Christ died and we have to believe in the efficacy of His death and resurrection and what that means for us. If we can't make it personal and we can't see our own short comings and the need for that sacrifice and that payment to be made for our benefit, then we're believing in vain. Let's back off a bit and think current events in the world. One might describe the current situation as the world coming apart at the seams. To some degree it is—it is a frightful circumstance. People talk about unprecedented situations—this pandemic thing that we have never experienced in 100 years. We have unprecedented economic contraction. That's a scary thing in a global economy that

demands growth, more growth and more growth. We've given up on the notion of saving and growing; now it's all debt driven. Modern monetary theory—just print more money. That's basically what it is. That's a fairytale by the way. We can get away with that for a short time but not for long.

As we look ahead at how we are going to respond to things which are likely to get worse before they get better, which would be my intuition. You look around and that's possibly the case.

Matthew 16:21 *From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. (NKJV)*

That wasn't very good news.

22) *Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" (NKJV)*

Here's a case of unbelief—Peter doesn't yet see and understand what it is that has to be accomplished; what Jesus must do in order to give us opportunity for eternal life. Jesus' response was quite sudden and forceful.

23) *But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." (NKJV)*

There's a critical point right there. Are we mindful of the things of God? Is that what drives us? Is that what drives our motivations? Is that what gets us out of bed in the morning? Or is it the things of men? I hope we understand the difference.

24) *Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. (NKJV)*

Oh, so you mean this cross business goes beyond just Jesus hanging there, bleeding to death? Yes. There are times where God asks us to deny ourselves. Get in the harness and partake in the sufferings of Jesus Christ. That's part of the reason we are suffering. It isn't necessarily because we are horrible sinners. God is teaching us through our experiences and we have to believe He is with us day to day.

25) *For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. (NKJV)*

It's a scary thing to turn your life over to God and lose all control as what you perceive to be life. The fact that we have control over anything is an illusion. We have control over when we get up and whether we can eat or drink assuming we have something in the cupboard. In the long haul we don't control much of anything. We have to trust God.

26) *For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? (NKJV)*

There have been a lot of examples of people that have given their soul for not very much.

27) *For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. (NKJV)*

Are you willing to wait for the ultimate reward, until God and His glory sends His Son Jesus Christ to intervene? Think about that. All we want and we want it now. Dear God, I need help, give it to me now. God is aware of our needs and He will provide for us.

28) *Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” (NKJV)*

That leads into the experience of the transfiguration on the mount—we won't go into that today. When is your compensation coming? What are you expecting? Luke 14—do you lose faith, do you become discouraged because God isn't rewarding you or intervening for you in the way in which you feel it should be done? We have to be really careful about bringing God into question. God is not on trial; we are on trial.

Luke 14:7 *So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them: (NKJV)*

We are at this Pharisee's place and Jesus tells this parable relative to choosing the proper place in the gathering.

8) *“When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him;
9) and he who invited you and him come and say to you, ‘Give place to this man, ‘and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. (NKJV)*

You're sitting up front and the host comes up and says we have somebody more important than you, we need you to move please—kind of embarrassing.

10) *-But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, go up higher. ‘Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you.*

11) *For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (NKJV)*

How about that? Isn't that interesting?

12) *Then He also said to him who invited Him, "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid.*

13) *But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.*

14) *And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you;* (NKJV)

Do you demand recompense? Do you demand compensation now in real time?

14 continued) ... *for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.*" (NKJV)

Could it be that the ultimate repayment will be at the resurrection of the just? We have the contrast between the way of the world and the way of God. The way of the world is getting all you can and consume it as soon as you can. There's going to be a resurrection—the ultimate reward. It's like Esau selling his birthright for a bowl of porridge. People, in order to satisfy their personal comforts will compromise who knows what. There's going to be a resurrection of the just. In Romans 3, Paul is dealing with the issues of the congregation of Rome and he points out that there is none righteous—no one—verses 10 and 11.

Romans 3:10 *As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one;*

11) *There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God.* (NKJV)

He was writing it to the church—to a congregation of God's church. Can the same thing be said of us? Are we not seeking God? Are we unrighteous? Let's hope not, let's hope we have moved beyond this at least. Go down to verse 19.

19) *Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.* (NKJV)

All the world may become guilty before God.

20) *Therefore, by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.* (NKJV)

Our compensation is being put off until the resurrection of the just, how does one become just? He's telling us how. The deeds of the law—by the deeds of the law—no one will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. In other words, you can't put together a list of good works and say, you owe me. It doesn't work that way.

21) *But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,*

22) *even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;* (NKJV)

All sin falls short of the glory of God. We have to trust that righteousness can indeed be ascribed to us and not through the sacrifice, through the life of Jesus Christ.

24) being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus ... (NKJV)

So, God offered the sacrifice of His Son to pay the price, to redeem us, to make it possible for us to be justified.

25) whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed ... (NKJV)

God passes over the sins previously committed, cleans us up, justifies us through the sacrifice and the payment of His sacrificed Son.

Passover season is here. We're familiar with John's statement in Chapter 17:3. This is Jesus praying before He was arrested and taken off to be crucified and He defined for us what eternal life was. This is eternal life; we're striving for something beyond the flesh and that's what God is leading us to.

John 17:3 *And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (NKJV)*

Turn to 1 Corinthians again as I want you to notice something. I hadn't noticed this before about this whole business of knowing God and who knows God and who doesn't and do we have an accurate view of Him or not. The words in 1 Corinthians 1, I hadn't noticed it quite this way before. I thought isn't that interesting?

1 Corinthians 1:20 *Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer [or the debater, those with the wisdom] of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? (NKJV)*

Notice carefully, verse 21.

21) For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. (NKJV)

It was a part of God's wisdom that it would be impossible for the world to know the true God through the course of their own wisdom. The New Living Translation says it a little more clearly, I think.

21) Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe. (NLT)

So, knowing the true God, which leads to eternal life is something that is revealed to us. It's something that we carefully cultivate. Finally, go to Colossians 3. Once again, you look at the world which is descending into chaos, uncertainty, volatility and all of the efforts of mankind are threatened, to be sure. Now we are being called to orient our lives according to God's plan and purpose and to dedicate ourselves to that. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, notice what he says.

Colossians 3:1 *If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. (NKJV)*

God knows that we have to eat and we need basic elements of life. Yes, there are things we can do to have those things available but God is aware of those things. It's a matter of what do we put first? Who is our Master? Is it God or is it stuff?

- 2) *Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.*
- 3) *For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (NKJV)*

Baptized into His death, resurrected to newness of life, that's what it's about. That's what we will renew and consider as we keep the Passover again this year.

- 4) *When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. (NKJV)*

Here again, that reference to that final compensation, yet ahead. Don't expect to get it today or tomorrow, but it will come in God's time.

- 5) *Therefore, put to death your members which are on the earth: [then He lists all the usual misbehaviors of mankind] fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*
- 6) *Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience ... (NKJV)*

God is going to sort the sheep from the goats, if you will. He is going to sort the righteous from the unrighteous. Once upon a time we lived in those things, but now, verse 8:

- 8) *But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. (NKJV)*

Put those things aside.

- 9) *-Do not lie to one another ... (NKJV)*

He's writing to a congregation of the church of God and telling them not to lie to one another—really? Hopefully we have progressed a little further than that.

9 continued) ... *since you have put off the old man with his deeds,*
10) *and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the*
image of Him who created him,
11) *where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised,*
barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all. (NKJV)

Do we stand on solid ground? I hope so. I hope we use the coming Passover season to once again bring to remembrance, those things God requires of us and the great benefits and blessings of going God's way. Thank you once again for your commitment to God's way as we go forward in a time, truly, of uncertainty and chaos that is developing in the world. Let's put forth greater effort to put our trust in God and to seek His guidance to lead us to His destination.