

Called to be Alone

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Brethren, many if not most of us have been in the fellowship of the Churches of God for many decades. Many of us have been attending services for over 30 to 40 to 50 years.

In years and decades past, we fellowshiped with rather large congregations. I know that here in Houston during the late 1980's and early 1990's, we had 5 congregations with a total attendance of approximately 1,800 members. The average congregation size nationwide was approximately 200 people.

Church life was very social. We fellowshiped every Sabbath before and after services. We had pot-luck meals. We had socials, picnics, camps, speaking clubs, game nights, basketball tournaments, volleyball tournaments, softball tournaments, adult Bible studies, teen Bible studies, choir practices, and so many other activities.

Then, as divisions occurred over the past three decades, the congregations became fewer and smaller. The number of activities dwindled. That is the recent history of the Churches of God.

And here we are today as members and participants in the Pacific Church of God. We are a very hardy group of members separated by distance from one another. Most of us do not have congregations in our areas. Many of us attend services alone in our homes. For many of us, the Feast of Tabernacles is the only time during the year when we can actually come together to fellowship and worship together in person with one another. And with the advent of the COVID variant, even attending the Feast may be uncertain.

Brethren, in my sermon this afternoon entitled Called to be Alone, I would like to discuss the subject of our calling, our spiritual growth, and our spiritual salvation by exploring the premise that our calling, our election, our relationship with God the Father and with Jesus Christ, and our entry into the Kingdom of God is performed on a personal and individual basis. We can have help from the ministry, from our friends, and from our families, but our spiritual salvation depends on what we individually do or don't do. Brethren, in the end, we are called to be alone.

Brethren, if we look at the examples provided to us in the Bible, the lives that the members of the Churches of God have had in the Church over the past decades have been an anomaly when compared to the history of the lives of the saints, our predecessors in the faith, and how they lived in their lifetimes.

We have lived in relative peace. Our lives have not been threatened because of what we believe or how or when we worship. Yes, many of us have lost employment because of the Sabbath. But we were not killed because of it.

We enjoyed all the activities, the fellowship, the coming together to worship without fear, the peace and assurance that we all had. We all took it for granted. What we knew as Church and all that went with it became a constant in our lives that we all grew used to and looked forward to.

But we need to ask ourselves: In what other age and time did the Father's called-out ones ever live like we have lived in the past 30 to 60 years? In what other age and time did the Father's called-out ones ever live their lives in relative peace and security?

Please turn with me to Hebrews 11. Brethren, our predecessors in the faith had very different lives that we have had in the faith. In Hebrews 11, we are told about the life of suffering that many saints had to endure in the past.

Hebrews 11:35 ... *and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:*

36) *And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment:*

37) *They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;*

38) *(Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*

39) *And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:*

40) *God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.*

Brethren, many of us now are alone. We don't have a congregation to enjoy. We watch or listen to services by ourselves. Maybe we are the only members in an entire city or entire part of a state or even in an entire country. Maybe we look back on the times we used to fellowship with larger congregations, and then we get discouraged because we are all physically by ourselves.

Brethren, to begin to explore this topic, let's turn to some examples in the Bible which help to show us that the majority of the saints were called to be alone. Again, what we have previously been accustomed to in the past has been an anomaly in the history of the saints.

To begin with please turn with me to Genesis 6, and we will read about a man and his family who were all alone, even though there may have been hundreds of millions of people alive on the earth. That man was Noah.

Noah

Please turn with me to Genesis 6. Yehovah was going to destroy all of mankind because of their violent and sinful nature.

Genesis 6:11 *The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence.*

12) *And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.*

13) *And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.*

14) Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch.

Yehovah spared Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives (8 people in all) out of the millions and millions of people. After the flood, they were totally by themselves.

Another example of a saint who apparently was alone in his devotion to God the Father was Enoch.

Enoch

Please turn with me to Genesis 5, and we will read a short segment about Enoch and verses which have been very misunderstood by many.

Genesis 5:22 – *And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters:*

23) And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years:

24) And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.

The Hebrew verb for *walk* in verses 22 and 24 is הָלַךְ (halak) Strong's #1980 which, in the Qal form of the verb, means "to go, to come, to walk". However, the verb form in verses 22 and 24 is not in the Qal form. Rather, it is in the Hitpael form, which conveys a completely different connotation and meaning. According to Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, *Halak* in the Hitpael form has the meaning of "to walk in the ways of" or "to walk after as in to follow." So in Genesis 5, Enoch was walking in the ways of Yehovah and following His commands and His will. He may well have been one of the only people at that time on the earth that God the Father was working with. That truly is being alone.

Another well-known example of a saint who apparently was alone in his devotion to God the Father was Abraham.

Abraham

Please turn with me to Genesis 12. Abraham obeyed God the Father and left behind the life that he had known.

Genesis 12:1 *Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:*

2) And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: [Skip to verse 4]

4) So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.

Abram obeyed God the Father and left Haran with his family, servants, and livestock. Abram most likely had lived all his life in Haran, and probably he had lived in the vicinity of his father and his forefathers. Not long ago, I made a timeline showing the lifespans of the patriarchs of the Old Testament. It is interesting to note that when Abram left Haran,

Shem, Arphaxad, Salah, Eber, Reu, Serug, and Terah all were alive. Except for Peleg and Nahor, all of Abram's forefathers back to Noah were still alive. When Abram left Haran, he most likely left all of his extended family, family that he grew up with and knew very well. And when Abram left Haran, he was alone with just his immediate family. His life completely changed as he walked away from everything he knew into the total unknown.

The best-known example of being alone in his devotion to God the Father was Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ

Please turn with me to Matthew 26. Jesus was sorrowful and in anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane on the last night of His physical life. He wanted comfort from His closest disciples while He prayed to His Father. He wanted companionship from His disciples at that time, knowing that they were there for Him, just being there with Him. That was the human side of Jesus. Whenever we are going through a severe trial, whenever we are in anguish over our future, we all normally want to have that human touch from friends, that human presence from friends. We all know that did not work in Jesus' case because of His disciples.

Matthew 26:38 *Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.*

39) *And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.*

40) *And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?*

That happened three times. His disciples let Him down. They all fell asleep, not understanding the significance of the events soon to unfold before them. Physically, Jesus was completely left alone and was by Himself.

Later, in the chapter in verse 55, we read that Jesus was once again abandoned by His disciples and was left all alone before the mob.

Matthew 26:55 *In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me.*

56 *But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.*

During the entire trial before the Sanhedrin, Jesus was alone. None of His disciples came to His aid. When he was paraded before King Herod, Jesus was alone when He suffered the mockings and the beatings. When He stood before Pilate for His trial and judgment, He was alone when He was sentenced to death. He was alone when He was painfully

scourged beyond recognition. And He was alone when He was crucified and died on Passover afternoon.

Brethren, the history of the saints is one of being alone. I would now like to explore three important points concerning our calling to be alone.

The first point concerning our calling to be alone is:

1. We are truly never alone

Please turn with me to John 16. Brethren, we are truly never alone, because God the Father loves us and is always there for us. Even though Jesus was all alone, He knew that His Father was always with Him. He mentioned this when He foretold His disciples that they would abandon Him.

John 16:32 *Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.*

33) *These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

So brethren, no matter how alone you may feel physically, no matter how distant you are from others in the faith, you are never really alone. God the Father and Jesus Christ are always with you and are ever-present.

Please turn with me to 1 Chronicles 28. King David tells Solomon that God the Father would never forsake Him while Solomon was in the service to the Father.

1 Chronicles 28:20 *And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do it: fear not, nor be dismayed: for the LORD God, even my God, will be with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the LORD.*

This same verse is referenced in Hebrews 13. It is important to understand that “the Lord” in this passage is Κύριος (kurios) without the definite article “the”, which is the way that the Greek Septuagint translates Yehovah into the Greek. The translators did not transliterate the name Yehovah; instead, they gave Yehovah the title “Lord or Master” in the Greek Septuagint. So, instead of “the Lord,” we can use “Yehovah” or “God the Father.”

Hebrews 13:5 *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*

6) *So that we may boldly say, The Lord [God the Father] is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*

So God the Father has promised to never leave us or forsake us. He is not like a weak human who has weak human frailties like Jesus' disciples had when they all forsook Jesus.

Please turn with me to 1 Kings 19 and we will read about a low point in Elijah's life which came immediately after a high point in his life. Elijah had just performed an incredible miracle at Mount Carmel against the 450 priests of Baal. What an incredible miracle of having fire fall from heaven and devour Elijah's sacrifice to where the water was even consumed by the fire. All 450 priests of Baal were then killed. What a great victory for Yehovah and for Elijah! However, Queen Jezebel issued a death warrant on Elijah, and Elijah fled for his life into the wilderness where he became depressed.

1 Kings 19:4 *But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.*

5) *And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat.*

6) *And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again.*

7) *And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee.*

8) *And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.*

9) *And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?*

10) *And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.*

[Skip to verse 14 Elijah again says the same words]

14) *And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.*

[What was ultimately God the Father's reply to Elijah? – Skip to verse 18 where Yehovah says] :

18) *Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.*

God the Father gently reminded Elijah in his depressed and dejected state that Elijah was not alone and that there were 7,000 other people in Israel who had not worshipped Baal.

Do we ever feel like Elijah? Do we ever feel that the battle is too intense, the struggle too great, and the road too far to continue our journey toward the Kingdom? Do we ever ask the Father to just let us die and be done with it? Do we feel that we are just all alone?

So brethren, even though it may seem like it sometimes, we are truly never alone, because God the Father is always there with us.

The second point concerning our calling to be alone is:

2. When we are weak, we are strong

Please turn with me to 2 Corinthians 12. Paul had much to write about this seemingly apparent contradiction.

2 Corinthians 12:8 *For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.*

9) *And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

10) *Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.*

How can this contradiction be true? Please turn with me to Philippians 4, where Paul encourages us to be content and confident no matter what state that we are in, even if we are all alone.

Philippians 4:11 *Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*

12) *I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.*

13) *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*

Brethren, what does all things mean? Does it mean everything except what I am going through? Everything except my circumstances in life? Everything except my trial or problem or fear or you name it? No, all things mean all things. It means everything with no exceptions. We won't turn there but Jeremiah 32:17 sums it all up in one verse:

Jeremiah 32:17 *Ah Lord GOD! [Adonai Yehovah – God the Father] behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee:*

Brethren, nothing is too hard for God the Father to do!

Please turn with me to 2 Timothy 1. The answer is that God the Father through Jesus Christ strengthens us and gives us the power to overcome and to push forward toward the Kingdom no matter what circumstance that we may be in. God the Father and Jesus Christ accomplish that through the Holy Spirit.

2 Timothy 1:6 *Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.*

7) *For God [ὁ Θεὸς ho theos – God the Father] hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*

Please turn with me to 1 Corinthians 4. The Apostle Paul continues to discuss the contradiction of weakness and power in our lives.

1 Corinthians 4:9 *For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.*

10) *We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honorable, but we are despised.*

11) *Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place;*

12) *And labor, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it:*

13) *Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.*

In these verses, Paul lays out the life of a Christian in those days, a life of hunger, nakedness, persecution and homelessness. Again, we have been living an anomaly in the life of the saints during the past 60 years. I do not believe these Christians in Paul's day had all the peace, tranquility, security, activities, and all the accoutrements of the Church that most of us have experienced.

Please turn with me to 2 Corinthians 13. Paul again writes concerning our strength coming from the power of God the Father and from Jesus Christ living in us.

2 Corinthians 13:3 *Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you.*

4) *For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you.*

5) *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?*

6) *But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates.*

7) *Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates.*

8) *For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.*

9) *For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection.*

Please turn with me to 2 Timothy 2. Paul encourages Titus to be strong and determined in his efforts to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

2 Timothy 2:1 *Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.*
2) *And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.*
3) *Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*
4) *No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.*

Brethren, if our deep sincere desire is to please God the Father in being a good soldier of Jesus Christ, He will give us more and more strength to overcome and to succeed in our journey to His Kingdom.

Please turn with me to Isaiah 35. Isaiah is prophesying of the Millennium when God the Father will work with all mankind, but this verse is also applicable to us, the saints with whom God the Father is working now.

Isaiah 35:3 *Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees.*
4) *Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you.*

Please turn with me to Romans 15. Brethren, the truth that God the Father has opened our eyes to gives us hope. Our relationship with Him and with Jesus Christ gives us hope. The truth of the plan of salvation gives us hope. Paul says that we should abound in that hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13 *Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.*

So brethren, we can abound in hope with the power from our Heavenly Father. We can be strong spiritually, emotionally, and mentally even though physically we are weak. We can be strong, confident, loyal, courageous, and obedient soldiers of Jesus Christ no matter where we are, no matter what condition that we are in, and no matter what trials, problems and tribulations that we face. Brethren, because of the Father's power, when we are weak, we truly are strong.

The third point concerning our calling to be alone is:

3. Spiritual salvation is personal and individual, not collective

Brethren, there are examples in the Bible of collective physical salvation. A primary example of collective physical salvation is the nation of Israel, where God the Father miraculously and definitively physically saved the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt, miraculously and definitively physically saved the Israelites for 40 years by feeding them and defending them during their years of wandering, and miraculously and definitively physically saved the Israelites time and time again throughout their history as a nation

until they were finally conquered by gentile nations because of their disobedience to God the Father.

However brethren, there is no such thing as collective spiritual salvation. Spiritual salvation comes through a personal and individual relationship with our Heavenly Father and not through being part of a collective association or collective group. There is no secret handshake. There is no secret Church badge that we can wear which gives us entry into our Father's Kingdom.

Please turn with me to Philippians 1. The Apostle Paul discusses the work that God the Father is performing in us and through us and that He will see that work completed in us.

Philippians 1:3 *I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,
4) Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy,
5) For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now;
6) Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:*

It is important to note in verse 6 who the "He" is in the verse. Who begins the work in us? Please turn with me to a very well-known verse in John 6:44.

John 6:44 *No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.*

So the "He" in verse 6 is God the Father because He is the one who begins the good work in us by calling us to Jesus. So verse 6 could be read as:

"Being confident of this very thing, that God the Father who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." That day of Jesus Christ is when we are resurrected as spiritual beings as very Sons of God.

Please turn with me to Philippians 2. Again, spiritual salvation is a very private and personal matter. Our spiritual salvation depends on our individual relationship with our Heavenly Father and with Jesus Christ. Our spiritual salvation does not depend on someone else's relationship with God the Father. There are no coat tails on which we enter the Kingdom. Ultimately, we are being judged on what we do or don't do and not on what other people do or don't do. They themselves will be judged for what they do or don't do.

Philippians 2:12 *Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*

The Greek verb for *work out* is *κατεργάζομαι* (katergazomai) Strong's #2716 which means "to effect by labor, to achieve, to work out, to bring about, to do that from which something results." So we are to labor and to work out to bring about our own salvation. Our

salvation is a personal and individual work which we work out and bring about with our personal and individual relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ. Brethren, we cannot earn our salvation. Salvation is a gift from our Heavenly Father. But we must do our part, and we must respond to our Father's will and do our Father's will.

Please turn with me to Galatians 6, where Paul continues this concept of individual salvation and the individuality of that salvation.

Galatians 6:4 *But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.*

5) *For every man shall bear his own burden.*

Brethren, each of us must prove his or her own work. And each of us will bear his or her own burden. This, in the end, is individual-based and not collective-based.

Please turn with me to Revelation 22, where we will read of a prophecy of Jesus Christ of what will happen at His return and at the First Resurrection.

Revelation 22:12 *And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.*

Again, Jesus Christ is coming with our reward, and He will give every man according as his work shall be. This is not a collective reward for collective work. This is a personal and individual reward for personal and individual work.

Please turn with me to Matthew 25, and let's read a very well-known parable that Jesus gave to His disciples, the Parable of the Talents.

Matthew 25:14 *For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.*

15) *And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.*

16) *Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents.*

17) *And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.*

18) *But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.*

19) *After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.*

20) *And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.*

21) *His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.*

22) *He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.*

23) *His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.*

24) *Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed:*

25) *And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. :*

26) *His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed:*

27) *Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.*

28) *Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.*

29) *For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.*

30) *And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Brethren, it is important to note four significant points in this parable:

a) Verse 15 shows that the talents were given out individually and not given out collectively. Different amounts of talents were given individually to the servants.

b) Verses 16 through 18 show that the talents were used and were increased individually by the individual servants. They did not pool their talents together in some sort of partnership.

c) Verses 20 through 30 show that the rewards for the individual efforts of the servants were given by the Master to each individual servant. The rewards were not collective in nature.

d) Verse 28 shows that the one talent which was given to the wicked and slothful servant was taken away from him. The Master did not ask the other servants to collectively give any talents to the slothful servant to add to his one talent. In fact, the opposite occurred. Verse 28 shows that the one talent that the slothful servant had was to be taken away from him and given to the servant who had ten talents. How different is that approach from the thinking of the world today where everyone receives a participation medal!

Brethren, there is no collectivization of group actions, group attitudes, group obedience, group righteousness which count toward an individual's personal spiritual salvation.

Please turn with me to the beginning of this same chapter of Matthew 25, and we will read another very well-known parable that Jesus Christ taught to His disciples – The Parable of the Ten Virgins.

Matthew 25:1 *Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.*

2) *And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.*

- 3) *They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:*
- 4) *But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.*
- 5) *While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.*
- 6) *And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.*
- 7) *Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.*
- 8) *And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.*
- 9) *But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.*
- 10) *And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.*
- 11) *Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.*
- 12) *But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.*
- 13) *Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.*

This parable demonstratively shows the individuality of our spiritual salvation. Note that in verse 8 that is no collectivization and sharing of oil for those who did not have any oil. What was the answer that the five wise virgins gave to them? Verse 9 states: "Not so, lest there not be enough for us and you." The five wise virgins understood what was at stake and were concerned that they may not have enough for themselves if they gave any oil to the five foolish virgins. Again, there was no pooling of resources so that all could achieve the goal. Each of virgins were judged on an individual basis. The five wise virgins had enough oil and were allowed in to the wedding. But the door was forever closed to the five foolish virgins. Collective resources could not save what they individually had not done.

Please turn with me to Luke 21, where we will read several warnings that Jesus gave to His disciples.

Luke 21:34 *And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.*

35) *For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.*

36) *Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.*

In verse 36, the verb for *to be accounted worthy* is *κατισχύω* (katischuo) Strong's #2729 which means "to prevail against, to have superior strength, to overpower." This verb has a very different meaning from "being accounted worthy." How many times in the past have we heard messages about being accounted worthy to escape the Great Tribulation and to be in the Place of Safety? This is not even what this verse is saying.

Luke 21:36 *Keep alert at all times. And pray that you might be strong enough to escape these coming horrors and stand before the Son of Man.* (NLT)

Luke 21:36 *But stay alert at all times, praying that you will have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.* (NASB)

The Greek word for *stand* is ἵστημι (histemi) Strong's #2476 which according to Thayer's Greek Lexicon can have the connotation of standing ready and standing firm. Therefore, verse 36 could be better translated – *But stay alert at all times, praying that you will have the strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand firm and ready before the Son of Man.*

So brethren, our spiritual salvation is personal and individual. There is no such thing as collective spiritual salvation.

So brethren, God the Father has called many of us to be alone at this time. Calling to be alone has been the norm and not the exception for most of the history of the saints called out by our Heavenly Father. As we explored in the sermon, our predecessors in the faith, the patriarchs like Noah, Enoch, and Abraham, all had to leave what they were used to in order to follow God the Father. And Jesus Christ left us an example of succeeding and being victorious when He was left all alone by His disciples.

Brethren, we explored three points concerning our calling to be alone:

- 1) We are truly never alone. God the Father and Jesus Christ are always there to strengthen us and to help us and to show love to us. They will never forsake us.
- 2) When we are weak, we are strong. This seeming contradiction is proven by the strength that God the Father and Jesus Christ give us, and that strength will overcome any physical, emotional, or mental weakness that we may have.
- 3) Spiritual salvation is personal and individual, not collective. We are judged on an individual basis on what we do and don't do, and not on what others do or don't do. There is no collective spiritual salvation through membership in any group.

Brethren, the grand majority of those of us in the Pacific Church of God and of those of us listening to this message are alone, separated from each other by perhaps hundreds of miles. For most of us now, "church" does not mean socials, picnics, camps, speaking clubs, game nights, sports activities, tournaments, studies, choir practices, and so many other activities that we may have enjoyed previously in our lives.

Because of physical limitations and circumstances, in most cases, the Pacific Church of God cannot offer those accoutrements and amenities to the brethren. But the one thing that the Pacific Church of God does offer the brethren is help and assistance and instruction on how to deepen your own personal relationship with God the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. And in the end, that's really all that matters. All the other entertaining activities are fluff. In fact, too many entertaining activities can end up being hindrances to and distractions away from the main goal and objective of deepening our relationship with our Heavenly Father. Everything else is secondary.

Please turn with me to Mark 12. The most important commandment that Jesus stated here goes to the heart of this sermon. Jesus is quoting from Deuteronomy 6:4, which is known as the Shema (which is Hebrew for “Hear” – the first word of the verse).

Mark 12:29 *And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord [Κύριος (kurios) without a definite article = Yehovah = God the Father] our God is one Lord:*

30) And thou shalt love the Lord [Κύριος (kurios) without a definite article = Yehovah = God the Father] thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

31) And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

Brethren, we cannot truly keep the second commandment if we are not keeping the first commandment.

Brethren, for most of us now, we have been called to be alone. Many of us have been abandoned by other brethren, by friends, and even by family. But as we have explored in this sermon, we are truly never alone. Brethren, let us be joyful, let us be happy, let us be thankful that God the Father has taken away most of the fluff from our lives to where we can truly have the time, the opportunity, and the determination to work on deepening our very special, personal, individual spiritual relationship with our Heavenly Father!