

Are You Watching?

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Here we are just a few days away from the Feast of Trumpets and as we all know this time of year leads into the fall Holy Days. We typically have our minds on the time and the events that are foretold in the Olivet prophecy and in the book of Revelation. Particularly as the Feast of Trumpets is coming with the Day of the Lord and cataclysmic events that will take place then. Often at this time, as church of God members, our minds go to all these events, even having interesting conversations where we speculate about how we think all the events are going to play out and how all this will come about. I love doing that as much as anybody. But as these conversations and these things come into our minds, we also think about the commands that Christ gave us numerous times throughout the Olivet prophecy that we need to be *watching*. We're going to see that He commanded, at least seven times, throughout the three accounts of the Olivet prophecy that we have a responsibility to be watching and He puts a very strong emphasis on this. We're going to look at this particular subject and look at why did Christ tell us to be watching and what specifically did He mean by watching? What was His definition of watching?

As we're going to see today, it's a subject that has been in many ways misapplied and misunderstood. I know it has been that throughout my lifetime in the church of God. We're going to look at this subject with an emphasis on: *why did Christ say to be watching* and *what did He mean by watching; what was His definition of watching?* If you would like a title for this sermon it's:

Are You Watching?

Those of you who have spent much time reading the Olivet prophecy I think are all familiar with the fact that numerous times in the three different accounts of this prophecy, Christ commands us specifically to be watching. He makes a very strong point about it. Oftentimes, this subject has been, in my opinion, misunderstood and misapplied. Understand as I talk about this, it is not my intent at all today, to in any way disparage those in the past who may have misapplied or misunderstood this because I think it was out of good intentions and it was the best understanding at the time. So, understand that I'm not trying to trash anyone in doing this. I do think we need to honestly look at how we have historically understood or applied this subject and understand the misunderstandings that we have applied that don't really match what Christ was talking about. What do I mean by this—let me demonstrate how I often heard this in my life time, growing up in the church of God. A lot of you are familiar, I've mentioned numerous times that I was born into the church of God and grew up all of my life attending it. What I often heard when I was young were statements like this:

“Christ told us to be watching so what should we be watching?
We should be watching Europe and the Middle East.”

Those were emphasized as specifically what we needed to be watching. The context of how that was addressed got into the concept of, if we are watching Europe and the Middle East then we'll be on top of world events. We will have an advanced warning of when all these things will come to pass and we can be preparing for it. That got translated into preparing for the place of safety or being ready to go and having your passport ready, your bags packed and things of that nature. It became an emphasis on—to put it bluntly—saving our skin; preserving our physical lives.

What I want to do first of all as we look at this subject is to read through these accounts and see that about seven times Christ makes the emphasis that we should be watching. Let's notice first of all why He said to be watching and then we'll look at the meaning of the Greek words to see what did Christ mean by "watching", what was His definition of what we should be doing to fulfill this command to be *watching*.

Let's start off in Matthew 24:36.

Matthew 24:36 *"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. (NKJV)*

We're going to notice that when we read the parallel account of this in Mark, Christ actually includes Himself in that statement. He doesn't know, the angels don't know, only the Father knows and that is an important observation for us to make.

*37) But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.
38) For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,
39) and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.
40) Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left.
41) Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.
42) Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.
43) But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.
44) Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (NKJV)*

He has very clearly said that you are not going to know the time. He's even come out and said the angels of heaven don't know the time and when we read the parallel account in Mark, we're going to see that He includes Himself in that statement too. He is saying He doesn't know when the time is going to be, so why is He saying to watch? Because you're not going to know when the time is. He's not saying watch Europe and the Middle East and if you're watching them then you'll know exactly when it's going to be and you can lay out your plan and formula for how it's all going to take place. Just to make another interesting observation of these scriptures, verse 40 and 41 are often

interpreted to be references to fleeing to the place of safety. Let's just follow that interpretation of these just to see a little logic. Those two verses get attached to the timing around people fleeing to the "place of safety" as it's often talked about. Let me just show you an observation.

40) Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left.

41) Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.
(NKJV)

Here's why I mention this. People look at this in terms of watching and their whole focus is trying to nail down the timing and be physically prepared and have their predictions of exactly when Christ is going to come. These conversations get into having my passport ready, my tickets ready to go and my bag already packed. A few years ago, a good friend of mine who does farming for a living, pointed out something that I had never even thought of myself—I never would have realized this if he hadn't told me. He was telling me how your finances work as a farmer. To paint a picture of this, I've always worked for a large company, working in HR. I'm sure for most people who work and receive a regular paycheck, every week or every two weeks or once a month—whatever your pay period cycle is—and there isn't really a big gap between when you do the work for something and when you actually receive your pay.

As my friend was explaining to me, for a farmer that's not how it works. He explained that you are paid at harvest time, and what I need for subsistence today—to buy groceries and pay bills—I did that work months ago. The work I'm doing today, I'm going to get my pay four months into the future when it's harvest time. The whole point he was trying to put across was, it talks about two working in the field and one is taken and one is left behind. There are numerous ways you might look at those scriptures but I'm just following the logic of people who apply this to the place of safety. The point he was getting at was that, if you're a farmer and anticipating in a few months it's going to be time to flee and you have your bags packed and your passport—if I'm anticipating that that's going to happen—there is no way I'm going to be out in the field wasting my time, tending my crops. If I don't think I'm going to be around when harvest time comes to get paid for it. What would be the point? There's no benefit in it. His whole point was, if two are in the field doing this, they didn't foresee that this was about to happen—it would come as a surprise—and that's the point I'm getting across here. Often our focus on watching is so that we'll know exactly when it's going to happen and nothing will be a surprise and that's the exact opposite of what Christ is saying.

Let's look at Matthew 25 to get another reference where Christ talks about watching. The first half of chapter 25 refers to the parable of the Ten Virgins. We think of the Olivet prophecy of being Matthew 24. There is a chapter break for chapter 25, but it's the same conversation. Everything that is covered in chapter 25 is the same conversation that Christ is having with the apostles that He had in chapter 24. In the beginning of chapter 25 He is giving a parable about ten virgins, in which we know He is teaching a lesson about church members having their spiritual house in order; and making it to the wedding and becoming Firstfruits. Because half the virgins in the story

don't have their act together when Christ comes, they wind up losing out on being a part of the wedding of the Firstfruits. Look at verse 13.

Matthew 25:13 *Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.* (NKJV)

So why did He say to watch? He said to watch because you're not going to know the time. He didn't say watch so that you will know ahead of time and you can predict everything. He says the exact opposite. He says watch and be ready because you're going to be surprised. Turn to Mark 13 and we'll see the parallel account.

Mark 13:32 *But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.* (NKJV)

He includes Himself in this one too—He doesn't know either.

33) *Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is.* (NKJV)

Why are we told to watch—because you're not going to know the time. He's not saying *watch* so you'll know the time, He is saying *watch* because you're not going to know the time.

34) *It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch.*

35) *Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—*

36) *lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping.*

37) *And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!* (NKJV)

Notice again He is instructing us to make a big point of watching and why are we watching? Because you're not going to know the time. Another interesting side note—Christ says the angels don't know and He Himself, as a God Being who has worked with the Father from the very beginning, He doesn't know. The reason I find that particularly interesting is that throughout my lifetime I've seen numerous situations where people claim that they have figured out the formula and they can predict exactly when Christ is going to return and when it's time to flee. What is interesting to me—and to be bluntly honest and kind of humorous—is they come up with their formula out of some prophecy in the Old Testament that they have now understood and can nail down. This gives them the formula of exactly how to predict the timing. I think it's a very easy argument to say that Christ had a perfect understanding of everything that was recorded in the Old Testament. Maybe by now, the Father has filled Christ in on the details—we don't know, we could speculate that—but we know for sure when Christ was walking the earth and He made these statements in Matthew and Mark that He dogmatically proclaimed that He didn't know the timing. We can be rest assured there is not a

formula recorded in the Old Testament, that if we could understand it exactly, we could know the time and have it all nailed down—it's just not there.

In Luke 21 we see a similar account.

Luke 21:34 *“But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.*

35) For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth.

36) Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”
(NKJV)

This matches everything that we've read in Matthew and Mark as well. If you notice in verse 35, He says that it's going to come as “a snare” to all those who dwell on the earth. The definition of the Greek word translated as *snare* is transliterated into English as *pagis* and is [Strong's #3803](#). The [Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament](#) by Spiros Zodhiates gives a definition for this word—actually specific to this verse—and he says its meaning is:

“As a snare shall it come up on them, i.e., suddenly, unexpectedly”.

He's saying this is going to come unexpectedly upon everybody. Notice there is a very consistent trend here. Christ has commanded about seven times in these three different accounts that we should be *watching*. And why does He say we should be watching? Because you're going to be surprised. This is going to come in ways you don't expect. It is going to come at a time you don't expect. You are not going to have predicted everything and be totally prepared. If you're a prep-er you're not going to have it all nailed down and the date figured out and all your preparations done. No, this is going to come as a surprise.

In my history in the church of God, we have often gotten this wrong. It's been a focus on we should be *watching* and what should we be *watching*—Europe and the Middle East and if you are watching that you'll figure everything out. This was literally the exact opposite of everything that Christ was saying. Understand, I'm not trying to degrade or trash anyone who had that understanding or taught those ideas because it was not unique to our timeframe to get this completely wrong. There is absolutely nothing new about having that misguided focus of missing the spiritual point and having our focus on the physical saving of our skin. This focus of trying to nail down the date rather than having our focus on the more important spiritual things. This has been happening literally since Christ and the apostles' time when He was first giving these instructions to them, the apostles themselves had the same misguided focus initially. We see this focus in Acts 1. The timing for this is after Christ had already been killed and resurrected. He's back to being a God Being and at the end of the forty days He spends with the apostles on earth before He ascends to the Father's right Hand. This is the final

words He said to them. Notice what Christ is focusing on and what the apostles are focusing on. Christ is focused on the important spiritual matters, the apostles are focused on the physical things—when is the end going to come? How do we save our skins and be prepared for that? Christ is telling them, “No you have the wrong focus here.”

Acts 1:4 *And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me;*

5) for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” (NKJV)

He’s obviously referring to Pentecost which was going to happen a few weeks after these statements. But think about the magnitude of what He is saying to them. He says if you just wait around in Jerusalem until Pentecost, you’re going to be recipients of the promise from the Father. I gave a sermon specifically addressing the promise of the Father a little bit earlier this year. This was a promise that was literally several thousand years in the making. This was the promise that God the Father made to Abraham, that all of mankind would be blessed through Abraham’s descendants because Christ was going to directly descend from Him and be the sacrifice to cover the sins of all mankind, enabling the opportunity for salvation to be offered to all of mankind. He was literally explaining to them that They were going to be some of the first recipients of this promise being opened up to mankind. They were going to have the opportunity to have the Spirit of the Creator God living in them to affect their minds and help mold His character in them. He was trying to convey all this spiritual meaning to them. But notice what the apostles’ minds were on, because they completely missed the point.

6) Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (NKJV)

What was their question? When is the end going to be?

“Just tell us the date so we can mark it on the calendar and be ready. Then we will know when our physical lives are going to be wrapped up and this can be over.”

They are totally missing the significance of what He’s telling them. Notice Christ’s response to this.

7) And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.

8) But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (NKJV)

He’s directing them right back to the spiritual significance of all that would come with them receiving the Holy Spirit—the molding of their character and the building of the

very character of God in them. This is what He's focused on, but what are the apostles focused on? The end, so they could mark it on the calendar and start counting down. They wanted a very a short-term focus and He's trying to get across to them that they've missed the point. Notice His answer to them when they ask the question, "When is the end going to be?" His answer was basically, "Guys that information is on a need-to-know basis and you don't need to know." He was telling them that's withheld and I think that is very much by design and it's a lesson we all need to learn. If you see how oftentimes this information can affect our spiritual focus, you can see why this information is withheld. What would we, as physical beings do if we knew the date and we could mark it down—we know Christ is going to come back on this particular date or the tribulation, or Day of the Lord period is going to start on this date—what would we do? I think for most human beings, we would actually act as I typically did as a kid when my mother would give me assignments of chores I had to do.

To tell you a story about the mentality as a typical kid. When I was young my mother would give me a list of chores and she would say "When I get home from work today, this list of things had better be accomplished, this is your responsibility to do these". What would I do as a kid? I wouldn't look at fulfilling my responsibilities as my first priority. I wouldn't fulfill my responsibilities by first getting on top of these chores and get all of them done and then use the rest of the time I have for having fun or whatever else I wanted to do. No, my perspective was the exact opposite. I would look at this and think, the deadline for getting this done is when mom walks through the door, when she gets home from work. She'll get off work at 5 o'clock and then I would estimate how long it took her to drive home. I would then spend most of the day having fun doing whatever I wanted to do. I would think in terms of what was the latest time possible that I can start working on this list of chores I'm supposed to do and still be able to get it done before she walks in the door so I don't get in trouble? As you can imagine there were some times where she would pop home earlier from work—faster than I had expected—and I would get myself into trouble. Or I would lose track of time because I was doing something I wanted to do and was enjoying and then I didn't have enough time to get it all done. My focus wasn't on my responsibilities, my focus was just on getting the minimum done so I didn't get into trouble. That's oftentimes, as physical human beings what our focus would be on if He told us when the end was.

What God wants to see with us is not those who can rush around to clean the house before Christ comes back so they don't get into trouble. He wants people who are committed to this way of life. People who fully believe in it and want to live it for the long term, regardless of how long it is, how painful or what they have to endure to live this way of life. He wants to know we are committed. So, Christ purposefully withholds that information. He lets us know that everything in this physical life is going to go away and what's important is spiritual. Then He will see who takes that for real and who seriously pursues that. That's why He doesn't give us that information because we would act like immature children if we were empowered with that information. He wants to know where our hearts are really at.

We've talked about why it is we should be watching. Now let's look at what Christ meant when He said *to watch*. Obviously, He was not telling us to watch Europe and the Middle East and you'll be able to figure it out in advance. No, every time He said to watch, He said that you are watching because you're not going to know. Obviously, it's not about being a prep-er and watching world events. Understand I'm not saying don't pay attention to world events, try to be wise in your decisions and see trials or tribulations that are coming your way. I'm not suggesting that at all, I'm saying that's not what Christ was talking about. What does He mean when He's telling us to watch? If we look at the meaning of the Greek words here it gives us an insight into what He meant. It's the exact opposite of the concept of watching Europe and the Middle East. He's talking about watching spiritual matters.

There's two Greek words in the seven times that Christ tells us in the Olivet prophecy to *watch*. We're going to look at both of these words and what they mean and then some examples of how they're used. The first word *watch* He mentions is used only two times. This is the Greek word *agrupneo*, it's Strong's #69 and the definition I'm going to give is from Zodhiates, [The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament](#). He defines it as:

“To abstain totally from sleep; to watch, wake, be awake, spiritually to be watchful and attentive to spiritual things.”

Notice it has nothing to do with watching world events and Europe and the Middle East. Again, I am not suggesting that we as church members should bury our heads in the sand and not pay attention to what is going on in the world around us; I want to be very clear I'm not suggesting that. I don't think that's a wise way to live. But I think it's very important that we understand that is not what Christ's commandments were about and if we get so focused on watching world events that we neglect our spiritual lives, we've missed the point of what “*watching*” is about entirely. To get an idea of what is meant by this word *agrupneo*, let's look at one of the examples where this word is used; it's only used in a small handful of times in the New Testament. A really good example is Ephesians 6. The word is actually used in verse 18 but I'm going to start in verse 10 to get the full context.

Ephesians 6:10 *Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.*

11) *Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*

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

13) *Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*

14) *Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness,*

15) *and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;*

16) *above all, taking the shield of faith with which, you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.*

17) *And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;*

18) *praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful [that's agrupneo] to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—*

19) *and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel,*

20) *for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. (NKJV)*

Notice what Paul is talking about by “being watchful”; it’s putting on the whole armor of God. It’s building the whole character of God and building that into our daily lives and how we behave. It’s using that spiritual strength of the Holy Spirit to fight off Satan’s temptations and his attempts to trip us up and get us off track. That’s what He means by “being watchful”. This is what Christ is talking about when He says repeatedly, “Watch” because you don’t know when I’m going to return and you’re not going to know the day. He’s not saying that if you’re watching you’re going to know ahead of time. He’s saying that if you are diligent about keeping your house in order it’s not going to matter when Christ is going to return. If you have a solid relationship with Him and the Father and you are doing everything you can do to diligently follow Them, regardless of when He comes, you’re in good shape because you have your spiritual house in order. That is what He is referring to.

As I mentioned, there are two Greek words that Christ uses when He gives us the repeated commands to be watching in the Olivet prophecy. *Agrupneo* was only used two of the seven times that Christ gave this command. The word that’s used the other five times is transliterated as *gregoreuo*, Strong’s #1127 and the definition I’m going to read also comes from Zodiates.

“To watch, to refrain from sleep; it denotes attention to God’s revelation or to the knowledge of salvation; a mindfulness of threatening dangers with conscious earnestness and an alert mind; keeps it from all drowsiness and all slacking in the energy of faith and conduct; it denotes the caution needed against anxiety resulting from the fear of the loss of one’s salvation.”

The worry over salvation and the preservation of others, the general attitude of alertness on the part of the Christian believer in the view of an actual or imminent test of his spiritual life. *Watchfulness* or *watching* indicates the Christian is alert or vigilant in order to defend himself against a spiritual foe. He is properly prepared for any surprise or sudden change in his circumstances, and above all, in order that his fellowship with God in prayer may be undistracted. Notice the whole emphasis on everything that is meant by *watching* is on the spiritual. It’s on having our spiritual house in order, our relationship with God the Father and Christ being solid, depending upon them to get us through whatever trials and persecutions that we may face in our lives. Trusting them to

deliver us. Constantly striving to build that character. That's what "being watchful" is. Let me once again be clear that I'm not suggesting we bury our heads in the sand and not pay attention to what's going on in the world. But we shouldn't deceive ourselves into thinking that doing those physical things somehow qualifies as being watchful and fulfilling Christ's instructions.

To see this a little more clearly, let me use some more examples where Christ Himself used the word *gregoreuo* and we'll see this same consistent emphasis on what He means by "being watchful". In Luke 12 we read a parable beginning in verse 35.

Luke 12:35 *"Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning;
36) and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks, they may open to him immediately.
37) Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. (NKJV)*

This is *gregoreuo* here but now let's read through the rest of this and notice the emphasis and the context.

*37 continued) ... Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them.
38) And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants.
39) But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.
40) Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." (NKJV)*

Notice once again we have that emphasis of,

"You are not going to know."

So, *watching* isn't about being able to predict and figure out what to be watching; it's being ready, regardless of when it happens.

*41) Then Peter said to Him, "Lord, do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people?"
42) And the Lord said, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season?
43) Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. (NKJV)*

Being watchful is the 'so *doing*' (in verse 43) when Christ comes.

44) *Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has.*
45) *But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,'*
(NKJV)

In other words, "Hey mom's not going to be home until 5:30-6:00 so I don't need to worry about it." But she surprises by coming home early and you get caught and don't have your house in order. That's what He is referring to here.

45 continued) *... and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk,*
46) *the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.*
47) *And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.*
48) *But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.*
(NKJV)

Notice the whole focus is on having our spiritual house in order, regardless of when the time is. Which is what we're going to talk about later in this sermon. Think about how Christ's commands have played out in the lives of the vast majority of New Covenant Christians throughout time. Christ walked the earth about 2000 years ago or more, so the vast majority of people throughout time have read these words and Christ didn't return in their lifetimes. Their day of judgment was the time in which they lived, from the time they were called until the day they died and that's when they were being judged and their salvation was being determined as to whether they made it or not. Exactly when Christ was going to return and when the Olivet prophecy events were going to take place was really irrelevant because they were being judged in the time that they lived. Even though the end time didn't come until centuries later, sometimes millennia later, that was quite frankly irrelevant in terms of their spiritual lives and whether they made it into the Kingdom.

To look at some other examples of Christ using this word, turn to Revelation 3, and a statement made to the Sardis church.

Revelation 3:1 *"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: 'I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.*
2) *Be watchful [this is the same Greek word], and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.*
3) *Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore, if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.* (NKJV)

Notice, once again, the whole focus is on getting your spiritual house in order. He describes the church in Sardis as dying out; their lamp is going out and they are in danger of losing their spiritual lives. He is not commanding them to watch world events—it's that they needed to get their house in order. Christ is telling them:

“Your spiritual life is falling apart. You need to pay attention to that and get your relationship with God the Father and Christ worked out and your spiritual life in order.”

Christ also uses this word in the context of the Day of the Lord. Revelation 16:15.

Revelation 16:15 *Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame. (NKJV)*

What's also interesting about this, is that it is in the context of the seven last “bowl plagues”. This is the latter part of the Day of the Lord when this statement is being made. The reason I point that out is, obviously Christ is not in any way talking about *watch world events* so you can see when things are going to get bad and prepare to have your bag packed and your passport ready to go to the place of safety—it's way too late for any of that. He's not talking about watching world events and you'll know when things are going to get bad—things are already really, really bad at the time this is being stated. We're already into the seventh trumpet, the seven last bowl plagues playing out, the earth is a mess at this point, the death toll has gotten massive. Things are really, really bad and everyone on the planet will know it at that point. But what is Christ talking about? Watching your spiritual life. Notice He talks about keeping your garments. When the Bible refers to our garments, it is basically a figurative reference to our behavior, to our spiritual life and our character and how we are living our lives. An easy way to see this is in 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. (NKJV)

When it refers to our garments it's a figurative reference. It is not referring to our physical clothes or our physical linen garments, it's a symbolic reference to being clothed in righteousness. Having the fine white linen is having been righteously obeying God and following Him and having that be everything for which your heart is striving. So, when Christ comments in the context of the Day of the Lord—*watch and hold onto your garments*—He's referring to our spiritual lives. He is saying that because it's in the midst of the Day of the Lord the whole focus is on our spiritual lives. That's the important point to see in all of this.

Often in my lifetime, we have looked at the subject of “watching” kind of like the apostles did when Christ was telling them to hang around to receive the promise of the Father.

He was trying to teach these deep spiritual lessons and we just looked at them like the apostles did.

“Tell me when the end is; tell me when these physical events will come about so I can plan my physical life around it.”

We completely missed the point. “Watching” refers to watching our spiritual development and our spiritual lives. In fact, we’re going to see that the Apostle Paul used this particular Greek word twice, this *gregoreuo* specifically in the context of watching out for Satan’s attacks upon our character. Once referring to being watchful of Satan attacking us—getting to our weaknesses and getting us off track and in the ditch. Then he uses this same Greek word in reference to being watchful of “false teachers”. Of wolves that come into our midst and being watchful that we are not led astray by them.

Let’s look at a couple of examples how this word is used in that context. First in 1 Peter 5:6.

1 Peter 5:6 *Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,
7) casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.
8) Be sober, be vigilant;* (NKJV)

Now I’m reading out of the New King James translation. If you have a New King James translation, you’ll notice next to the word *vigilant* a little number 2 and if you look in the margin it says *watchful*. It’s basically saying, *be sober, be watchful* because this is *gregoreuo* this same Greek word. Notice what he is saying to be watchful of, it has nothing to do with world events.

*8 continued) because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.
9) Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.
10) But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.
11) To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.* (NKJV)

He’s talking about being watchful of how Satan may play upon your weaknesses and tempt you and get you off track and distracted. Sometimes, quite frankly that may be the whole focus of looking at the subject of being *watchful*. As if it’s just about being a physical prepper and trying to have all our physical preparations in line so we can endure through hard times—again I’m not suggesting that we shouldn’t take practical measures to try and be prepared for difficult times—but if our whole focus becomes that and we neglect our spiritual lives, we have missed the whole point. When it comes to being watchful in regards to Satan’s attacks, I think one of the things we all need to

think about comes from a lesson a good friend of mine taught me several years ago. This is probably going back a decade or more ago.

I was having a conversation with this good friend and we were talking about Satan's attacks and trials and how he can come at us. We were talking about what the future might hold for us and my friend made an interesting comment that I've always remembered. He smiled and looked at me and said, "I can even tell you how he's going to come at you" and he just grinned at me. I was intrigued by that comment and said, "OK what is your take on that, how do you think he is going to come at me?" He smiled and said, "Wherever you're most vulnerable". In other words, whatever is your weakness, whatever is something that can get you when you're at a weak moment to try and trip you up—that's how Satan is going to come at you. One of the ways we need to be watchful in our spiritual lives is to be aware of where our weaknesses are because that's where Satan is going to try and trip us up. Whatever is something that is our weak spot that will get under our skin and get to us, getting us distracted and off in the wrong direction. That's how he's going to do it. He's going to try and come at the most effective opportunity to trip us up and get us off track.

One way he can do that is through false teachers. Paul also gives us a warning in the book of Acts using this same Greek word referring to that very subject. Turn to Acts 20 and we'll see a warning that Paul gave to the leaders of the Ephesian church.

Acts 20:29 *For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.*

30) Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.

31) Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. (NKJV)

He's saying "Be watchful for wolves coming up from within your own midst." Looking back over my lifetime in the church of God, oftentimes, certainly prior to the mid '90's, our focus was on being on guard from persecution from the outside. From the government or other people who want to persecute us or those false teachers of the world—the world's churches and such. What did we learn, in a painful way, from the mid-'90's all the way up to today? Our biggest danger is the wolves coming in from our midst. It's false teachers within the church of God coming up and leading people astray with appealing sounding arguments. They sowed a lot of heresy and people let their guard down and were sucked in and drawn off track. One of the things we need to be mindful of if we're going to fulfill Christ's commands to be watching in our spiritual lives, is to be on guard against heresy coming from within our own midst. False teachers coming, not from outside, but from within the church of God and sowing false doctrines to get us off track. That's one of the things we need to be watchful of.

As I've covered throughout this sermon, Christ's whole focus on *watching* is not about our physical preparedness, it's about being mindful of our spiritual lives and having our character in good condition and our priorities correct by focusing on spiritual matters.

One of the ways that this whole focus got misguided throughout our time in the church of God was on this physical idea of saving our skin. About saving our physical lives and protecting us from persecution. I'm going to describe the culture I grew up in, being taught this subject in the church of God, and in kind of blunt terms. Realize I'm not trying to disparage anyone, I'm trying to get us to realistically look at some of false narratives, that many of us, myself included, bought into for many years in the church. We often got focused on the subject of watching from a physical preparedness point of view which was about saving our skin, you might say—our physical lives.

What we bought into was what I'm going to bluntly call a "feel-good fairytale". What I mean by that is the story got put across as the idea that, as long as you're a faithful Philadelphian, as long as you're diligent in following God and you're paying attention and you're watching world events, you'll have your spiritual house in order and you'll be chosen as one of the people who flees to the place of safety. Basically, the scenario was, that things will go relatively okay as we've understood them living in the U.S. and other Western nations. We've lived in a relatively free democracy and right before things start to get really bad, all the good and faithful Christians will get whisked off to the place of safety and protected from everything and then the clock started. Once you get to the place of safety, it's just three and a half years, it's just a sprint now and not a marathon. You can start counting down to when Christ is going to return and you just endure those three years and then everything is great and we start the millennium. Let's look at a few scriptures about how this idea was put together. Let me also be clear, I'm not saying there's not a place of safety and there's not people who will be protected in one—I'm not suggesting that. I think the narrative that we created around this, created a false sense of security, a false focus on saving our physical lives and our physical skin. It also sold us on a "feel-good fairytale", just to be bluntly honest about it. It quite frankly made a false picture of how New Covenant Christianity works in the first place. In Revelation 3:10; there's a promise that is made to the church in Philadelphia. Again, I'm not denying this promise at all, but I want us to notice what is actually stated and what it doesn't state.

Revelation 3:10 *Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. (NKJV)*

Oftentimes, what this scripture got turned into was the idea that as long as you are a faithful Philadelphian and you're diligent in obeying God, you will be protected from all persecution; you get whisked off to the place of safety. You don't need to worry about the ugly things that will happen to those bad Laodiceans who are not following God. Let's notice what this verse actually says. The verse talks about being protected at a time of trouble that infects the entire earth—everyone who dwells on the earth. That has to be referring to the Day of the Lord. If yes, we know there are difficult times that lead up to the Day of the Lord happening when the Beast power persecutes those who are not in line with the Beast. There are areas of the world where there will be war and other troubles that take place, but if you read through all the prophecies honestly, does the majority of the world, a lot of that time prior to the Day of the Lord, see it as a horrible

trial that's come upon on everyone who dwells on the earth? No, it says they get rich off the trading of the Beast and they mourn when the Beast power is overthrown and defeated. They saw this as a wonderful time. They didn't see it as a horrible time to affect the entire earth. Yes, there are those who are not in line with the Beast who will be terribly persecuted prior to the Day of the Lord, but a time of trouble that affects everyone on the entire earth at the same time? That has to be referring to the Day of the Lord. So, what it is actually talking about here is protecting those who have been faithful, during the Day of the Lord, the time of God's wrath. That is not a blanket promise that these people are protected from all persecution and from all physical pain, it's simply not saying that.

Let's also look at the verses that are often interpreted to be the flight to the place of safety. Let me also be clear as I start to address these verses, I personally think that this is probably referring to a group of people being protected at the end time from a lot of the persecution, but let's also notice what it says and what it doesn't say. We've read a narrative into this that created a "feel-good fairytale" for us that doesn't really match what is said on the page. This is in Revelation 12:13.

Revelation 12:13 *Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child.*

14) But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.

15) So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood.

16) But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.

17) And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. (NKJV)

Let me say, prophecy is often vague and we have to make interpretations and guesses as to what exactly it's referring to. I don't challenge the idea that this is referring to a place of safety and a group of people who are protected from a lot of persecution from the Beast power at the end time. I think that is probably an accurate interpretation of this. But let's be honest about what it says and what it doesn't say. It refers to two groups of people. In one it refers to being put in this place of protection, the other it refers to being persecuted and Satan going after them. Notice it never says at the end of the chapter that this group that is not protected and are being persecuted are those lukewarm, awful Laodiceans. It doesn't say that, it says they keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. It puts them in a positive light. One of the things we need to understand is that this narrative we have built into this which I have bluntly called the "feel-good fairytale" is based upon another "feel-good fairytale". It's the idea that bad things don't happen to good people. This is a fundamental misunderstanding of how New Covenant Christianity works.

As I've pointed out in numerous sermons in the past, if you look in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, yes, there were promises that were made to Ancient Israel, and in there you will see the idea of bad things happening to bad people and good things happening to good people because this was a covenant made with a nation who were not being offered salvation. They were being offered, if they were obedient to the letter of the law, these wonderful blessings that would keep pouring upon them as long as they obeyed. But if they disobeyed, here's all the trouble you are going to face as a result of that. New Covenant Christianity works quite a bit differently. It flat out tells us in numerous places all throughout the New Testament that as a New Covenant Christian, you're going to have to endure to the end. Now just think about that for a moment. Would you have to endure through something, that if you were faithful then bad things would never happen to you? Would that be expressed in terms of, you're going to have to endure through this experience? No, you endure through something that is difficult and painful that you are striving to get through and get to the other side. That's how New Covenant Christianity is described.

Let's look at a couple of scriptures that address this. Look at 2 Timothy 3:12.

2 Timothy 3:12 *Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.* (NKJV)

Notice, you are promised to suffer persecution. I've mentioned in numerous sermons over the years, that doesn't necessarily mean that we're all going to face what the Apostle Paul did, where you are put in prison and physically beaten up and they try to stone you. This means that you're being persecuted through Satan making your life painful and difficult. He can do that in lots of ways that don't involve the government throwing you in jail or people trying to actually physically kill you. My point here is that it promises all of us, that we're going to suffer persecution. It doesn't say that just those bad Laodiceans who didn't get their spiritual house in order will face persecution but you good Philadelphians don't have to worry about anything. Right before everything gets difficult, you'll get whisked off to a place of safety. It will be nirvana for three and a half years and then Christ will return and everything will be wonderful. As long as you're faithful and diligent in your Christian life, everything will be positive, feel good and happy for you. That is a massive misunderstanding of what the entire New Testament says about New Covenant Christianity. Let's notice one more scripture on this subject in Acts 14:21.

Acts 14:21 *And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, 22) strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, [notice this quote] "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."* (NKJV)

They are saying that the path to the Kingdom of God is difficult, it's painful, you're going to have to endure your way through it and you're not just going to have one nasty trial, you're going to have a lot of them. Your life is going to be difficult and you're going to

have to endure through it. It's only those who successfully endure to the end who make it into the Kingdom of God. You don't create that picture if you're dealing with a situation that, good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. I think it would behoove all of us to consider the reality of what has been the experience of the vast majority of Christians from a time of Christ up to our day today. The original apostles as we have already seen, believed they lived in the end time and that was going to happen in their physical lifetimes. We're about to look at a scripture where Paul himself thought that as well. As we all know they were off by about 2000 years. It didn't happen like they were expecting but they still had to successfully endure through all manner of trials, particularly Paul himself. Let's quickly look at that, in 1 Thessalonians 4 and we'll see a statement that makes it very obvious that Paul, at the time he was writing this letter fully believed that he was going to live to see Christ return in his lifetime. I think from his other writing he realized later in his life, that was not how the movie was going to end. I think most every generation of the church of God since the original apostles has believed that it would happen in their lifetimes as well. I think that's been a commonality.

1 Thessalonians 4:13 *But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.*

14) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

15) For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. (NKJV)

Notice he said, *we who are alive*—he's thinking when he wrote this that he is going to, in his physical lifetime, see Christ return.

16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

17) Then we who are alive [again he is thinking he will be alive at that time] and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

18) Therefore comfort one another with these words. (NKJV)

As we can see, Paul himself believed he was going to see Christ return in his physical lifetime. Later in some of his other letters it was obvious he had come to the conclusion that it wasn't going to happen. Just imagine what it would have done to Paul's spiritual life if he had bought into the "feel-good fairytale". How disillusioning would that have been to him in his spiritual life when we see the reality of what his life was actually like? Let's go to 2 Corinthians 11:22.

2 Corinthians 11:22 *Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I.*

23) Are they ministers of Christ? —I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, [notice his list of trials] in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.

24) From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.

25) Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep;

26) in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

27) in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—

28) besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. (NKJV)

That's an incredible list of the stuff he went through. Obviously, the vast majority of Christians have not had to go through that kind of a list of trials of one horrific thing after another. I think there is a thought that we ought to consider, in terms of our expectations of the end times and how all of this will play out in our lives and our fulfilling of Christ's commands to be watchful. Realize as I share my thoughts with you, I'm like everybody else; I don't know the time as I made very clear in the beginning of this sermon, I think that information is withheld and none of us know and all we can do is speculate and give opinion.

Let's think a little differently about what the Bible actually says. About what it actually says and what it doesn't say. The Bible describes the end time, particularly around the Day of the Lord as the "Time of the Gentiles". I've mentioned numerous times, that if you look back over world history from about the 1500's to the current day, your Israelite descended nations have been major players on the world scene. They have been very dominant—at one point they had colonized most of the planet. Even today, financially, we are still very affluent compared to a lot of the rest of the world, and are still significant on the world scene. When you are at a time referred to as the "Time of the Gentiles", obviously that is going to change. There's going to be a point where these nations lose their prominence, they are not such big players on the world scene and the Gentile nations become dominant.

We often picture this as a very rapid-fire process, where things go relatively comfortably for us, then immediately the Beast pops up on the scene, the good guys get whipped off to the place of safety and then the bad stuff happens. The Bible doesn't specifically lay all that out. It just gives us some vague principles of where this is going to go. I think it would behoove us to consider a completely different way of looking at this. Let me share a conversation I had with Rick Railston in the last month or two. This is just one man's opinion and thoughts, but I just think we should consider the spiritual lessons from this.

The context of our conversation was about the end time and the frightening state of the world as we are watching it now. I made the comment to Rick that I don't necessarily expect the events in the Olivet prophecy in Revelation to necessarily happen in my life

time, but that I would not be surprised at all if I see the end of the U.S. as I've known it during my life—the free comfortable democracy we have experienced, and its dominance on the world scene. If that doesn't come to an end in my lifetime and circumstances change radically, the free society and affluence that we have experienced, comes to an end and then we will see the “Time of the Gentiles” come. I think it would be wise for us to at least consider the possibility that this scenario could play out in some way like that. In other words, we could go through some very difficult times when the “Time of the Gentiles” comes upon us. But the events of the Olivet prophecy in Revelation could be some unknown number of years beyond that. In other words, we have to endure through some very difficult times in our Christian lives and it's a marathon and not a sprint.

It makes a very feel-good happy story if we think we know exactly when things get bad and there's just three years left and you can be in the place of safety. You just have to endure through that and finish the sprint and you're done. But what if it's a marathon? What if things get very difficult and that goes on for who knows how many years and you finish out your physical life enduring through some very difficult circumstances. Then Christ returns some number of years after that. In terms of our spiritual lives, it doesn't matter which scenario takes place. We have to spiritually endure through whatever circumstances occur in our lives. We have to remain faithful and trust in God to get us through. He has promised to be with us, to never desert us, to be with us all the time through whatever trials come our way and to help us successfully endure to the end. He'll be there for us to get through it. If we set ourselves up believing in a “feel-good fairytale”—that things will never get too difficult for us because as long as we are faithful, we will be protected from all pain. But then life becomes really painful—imagine the disillusionment that could happen. That is, in my opinion, very damaging to people's spiritual lives, to sell them on a “feel-good fairytale”. We are much better off dealing with the reality of the Bible that tells us that if you are a Christian following Christ, you are going to face persecution in one way or another. It may be from friends and family, it may be from the government, it may be from health trials, it may be from whatever comes at you; you are promised persecution. You're also promised that God will be there with us, through the power of His Holy Spirit to strengthen us, to enable a way through it for us to be able to endure it. We can trust in God to get us through it, but I think there is a grave danger in looking at this from a “feel-good fairytale”, that as long as I'm a faithful Christian, then everything will be comfortable. That is simply not what the Bible tells us.

The Bible tells us to have a sense of urgency, that this physical life is going to come to an end but it doesn't matter when these events actually take place. So, to wrap up, let's look at a couple more scriptures. 2 Peter 3:10.

2 Peter 3:10 *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.*

11) Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,

12) looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?

13) Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (NKJV)

We know how the movie ends; it ends very positively. That doesn't necessarily mean that the events in Revelation come in our lifetime. It doesn't matter whether they do or not. Our responsibility is to be watchful and remain faithful in developing our spiritual lives and staying close to God, regardless whether this happens in our lifetime or not. Being spiritually prepared to endure through whatever trials might get thrown of us because that is being *watchful*. For one final scripture, turn to Romans 13:11 and notice that this is good general advice that Paul gives to all of us and it doesn't matter whether the Olivet prophecy is fulfilled in our lifetime or not.

Romans 13:11 *And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.*

12) The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.

13) Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.

14) But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. (NKJV)

What Paul is telling us is to “*be watchful*”; to make good use of the time that we have because our day of judgment is now. It doesn't matter exactly when the end comes—we're not going to know until it happens and it really doesn't matter whether it happens in our lifetime or not. We need this same sense of urgency to be watchful of our own spiritual lives to make sure that we make it into the Kingdom of God. Yes, we rehearse the fall Holy Days every year to know how this movie is going to end, to know that this physical life is temporary. But whether we live in this physical life to see those events happens is quite frankly, irrelevant. What's important is that we are around as spirit beings to be a part of the playing out of all this plan out. As we go forward now into the fall Holy Days, let's make sure we are fulfilling Christ's command to “*be watching*”.