

Why Are We Called to Be Here Now?

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I think you're going to see; I'm really never surprised at this, you'll see in my message the messages that have already been given, especially from the first day. There's going to be some similarities and some overlap. I'm never surprised that, I'm always fascinated by it. God uses all of us—any of us who yield to God—like a filter. It doesn't matter if it's even the same topic, it will be approached differently. You're going to find that in mine today.

I'll refer back to Rick's introduction yesterday, the questions that we always hear at the Feast and thinking back on the many Feasts we have attended, it's been 50 for us unless I've lost count. I know to some folks here, we're just "newbies". I know Rick and Dorothy have been around for much longer than that. I remember all those Feast sites and where there would be 1000's of people. Rick was correct, Mr. Armstrong would stand up there and he would say, "Why are you here?". With all due respect to HWA, I remember many times we would be yelled at with half of us were converted and half of us were not.

Those common questions were, "Why are you here and why were you called now?" I'm going to use both of those. We're all sitting here? Why aren't we somewhere else? Why aren't we out in the rest of the world? On the way here this morning I drove by all the churches—and by the way, I was going to ask Rick when he was going to hand out the speaking assignments. How did he know I always wanted to give a sermon Sunday morning? Just kidding. Why are we here? Why were we called? Actually, both of those contain an answer—actually a couple of answers and I'll try to articulate that the best I can. Again, I am suffering a little bit of the aftermath [of Covid] and I'll try not to hack through the sermon. I'll do whatever I can do and we'll trust God for the rest.

Anybody who knows me, knows my voice is two or three octaves lower than it usually is. I'm a little bit hoarse. Also, as a warning, it has affected my hearing—it did the same thing with Marie.

To get back to what I'm going to talk about, it's a combination of two questions and the answer to those questions. My title is:

Why Are We Called to Be Here Now?

I tried to change up that title a little bit and make it a little different—a little different approach. Just thinking back, and it has been referred to a little bit in the different messages, at my age (my wife and I have birthdays this month, I'll be 83 and she will be 88) we have to think about death. It's just a real possibility. Again, as I point out numerous times and my friend John points it out to me, I bring up golf terms. In golf lingo, I'm "on the back nine". If you don't know what that means, one of us golfers can

explain it to you later. It's the last part; in other words, the road in front of me is a lot shorter than the one behind me. I know that, I realize that. I'm sort of a history buff. Isn't that kind of crazy? Whenever we go to school or college, we think history is a boring topic. I remember that in high school. I thought why do I need to know this stuff? But as we get older it becomes interesting. It becomes a context for a lot of things we remember and do especially when Memorial Day comes around. I think a lot about the documentary type Memorial Day presentations that you see. I'm kind of a YouTube junky myself and I see a lot of those there. It makes me very sad, especially when they go through the cemeteries and play music in the background, like a haunting version of O Danny Boy. It's very moving to me. The point is, people suffer and people die, that's just a fact.

I remember years ago we visited a gentleman and he was suffering and close to passing away. Rick and I visited him and the following morning he passed away. I've been up at the hospital with different brethren—friends and family—held hands and just sat there. I can remember a couple of cases where a person was just out of it and it's enough to just sit there and hold their hands. They know somebody is there. Then when they pass away you know their suffering is over. Some are waiting on the resurrection. Even those in the world who die—they will die at some point—they will be resurrected and we are here picturing that. Let's turn to Ecclesiastes. I did my father's funeral because he was in his 90's and he had no friends left. He had no religious affiliation so I did his service for him. This out of the New Living Translation.

Ecclesiastes 7:1 *A good reputation is more valuable than costly perfume. And the day you die is better than the day you are born.*

2) Better to spend your time at funerals than at parties. After all, everyone dies— so the living should take this to heart. (NLT)

In other words, going to a funeral, forces you to consider your own mortality.

3) Sorrow is better than laughter, for sadness has a refining influence on us. (NLT)

It should inspire some introspection on our part; about our life, what it's meant, what difference it's made.

4) A wise person thinks a lot about death, while a fool thinks only about having a good time. (NLT)

That's basically the world. The world doesn't realize that everything is temporary. That's part of what we're picturing here—being temporary. I usually follow the obituaries and I worked for a corporation that had 1800 people—I didn't know everybody, there was probably 100 to 200 departments— and I would recognize a name. Then I worked construction for 20 years so I know a lot of people. If I see a person in the obituary that I knew, I think about that person and wonder if they had any influence on me in some

way. More importantly, did I have any on them? It makes you think about what you could do to help people.

As we go along and study, meditate and pray, we don't often think about why God called us now. What could I do to help people that need help? When you go to funerals, there are grieving families there. There's always grief—an atmosphere of grief—and that is normal. You think as an individual, what could I do to help people? Even in a larger sense, part of what we're picturing here, what can I do as an individual, can I make a difference to a dying world? We're picturing that too—we're surrounded by a dying world.

We live in West Richland, it's about a 15-minute trip—10 miles, maybe more. On the way here I pass by all the churches—everybody is in church today. We think about how insignificant we are as individuals when it comes to helping people—we're just a tiny speck in this vast universe. We wonder, what can I do to help people when they need help and comfort? Let's turn to Psalm 8; David talked about this. Again, I'll be using the New Living.

Psalm 8:1 *A wise person thinks a lot about death, while a fool thinks only about having a good time.*

2) You have taught children and infants to tell of your strength, silencing your enemies and all who oppose you.

3) When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers— the moon and the stars you set in place— (NLT)

We look to some of that season to season.

4) what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them?

5) Yet you made them only a little lower than God [some translations say angels, it means lower than spirit beings, we're not there yet] and crowned them with glory and honor.

6) You gave them charge of everything you made, putting all things under their authority—

7) the flocks and the herds and all the wild animals,

8) the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, and everything that swims the ocean currents. (NLT)

Harkening back to creation week.

9) O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth! (NLT)

David is speaking in a plaintive cry considering all the blackness of the universe and what our place in it is—what is our place in it, there has to be a reason for man. That's what he's wondering. That is an age-old question that we have as human beings.

I don't know much about him, but Astronomer and astrophysicist, Carl Sagan—1934-1996 was his life span—said,

“Are we just a speck of sand on the shore of this cosmic ocean?”.

We think we might be able to help a few people, touch a few people, but we really can't do very much to help very many people. Just the people who touch our lives. We think, “Can I make a difference in the grand scheme of things? Can I really do something?” It comes down to that question, “Why are we called?” Our religion isn't supposed to be just a routine practice of keeping the Sabbath, the Holy Days, paying tithes and all that—it's supposed to be more than that. It's supposed to be something that is very real. This was been spoken about on the first day. Something that does make a difference in the lives that we touch. That's our example and our behavior and we'll get into that.

The reality of death and the state of the world should help us focus in on why we are called and why we are here. Getting back to that age old question and what the ultimate future of mankind is going to be. To me and my thinking—we all filter things differently—there are two answers to those two questions. There are actually more answers but I'm going to try and concentrate on two. I told myself a while back, I'm trying to speak in threes. Have three points, three sub-points, three scriptures under each point. So that I don't go over time.

Why did God call some people now? Why didn't He just call everybody? We know that's not the way God works. Let's go to Matthew 7—this has been touched on. A dominate theme for all of us as God's people. I'll be using the New King James for this one.

Matthew 7:13 *“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.*

14) Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (NKJV)

Just as a reference, back in Matthew 13 where the disciples ask Christ, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” And Christ responds, “Because it's given to you to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven, the Kingdom of God.” It's just not given to everybody now—we're not all called now. So, we take that literally, there's only going to be a few people called and most are going to find destruction. We don't believe there is only one calling, only one day of salvation, only one chance—we don't believe that or teach that. If we did believe that, the only conclusion we could draw is there are only a few people who are going to make it into God's Kingdom and the rest of humanity is going to be destroyed. We don't believe in that finality. We don't doubt Christ's words. We know that a few are going to be called now—that's us. Given that knowledge and understanding. We know about the resurrections, when some are going to face the first death, but we also know about a second death where some are going to face the lake of fire. We know that Christ gave these words to His disciples and expected these words to be later used and taught, even down to His return. Only a few are called now and God has a purpose for that. Only a few are called now into the truth, go through life

following God's way which was discussed quite a bit in the first message—following God's way.

Let's not forget, we do know that the majority of mankind now—we have that wonderful knowledge—that the masses will have access to God in the future. That narrow way that we talk about will now be a broad way then. It will be an opportunity for everyone. There's a reason we are all sitting here. We are here to rehearse and picture that future reality. I recall once being at a graveside service for one of the brethren. There was a large extended family there—many friends—and I looked at those people and thought, these people are very sincere and very nice people but they need help in understanding that this physical death—this physical life—is only temporary. You really can't help them with that today, not directly. I really admire people who are able to relate to people that are grieving and can actually give them some comfort. I'm not very good at that. We're all products of our upbringing. Most of my life has been achieved the hard way—aside from God's obvious blessings. We recognize those and deeply appreciate those all the time. Standing here, I think I'm the only original Tri-Citian here. We go back to 1946. My father was drafted when he was 29 years old in 1944 or 1945 and then right after that, he was a construction carpenter and back then the post war years, all these young families were on the move. I grew up in a 30-foot trailer. We would go from camp to camp—construction camp. Out here in Hanford there were 60,000 people in trailer camps and most of those were skilled craftsmen working on the nuclear power plants. There were five of them on the river. If you have a nuclear power plant you have to have water for cooling. I just grew up that way. Kind of a hard upbringing for kids in those days—moving all the time. Ever since then, I've never heard anyone come up to me and ask, what can I do to make your life easier? I never heard that growing up. I never heard it in the military either.

Back to the point, due to my upbringing I've never been on the receiving end of sympathy so it's a littler hard to give it, although I recognize the problem. Most of us sitting here can look on our background, the way we were raised, all those influences that made us what we are, shape our personalities and we're different people now. I see it all the time. I've even been around people who have known me for years and say I've changed. I didn't know I had changed but they saw something in me that changed.

We know that people—even those hurting people, and the world is full of people who are hurting. The world is hurting right now and in a great deal of pain, it just doesn't feel it yet—they don't understand God's way of life. They don't understand what the ultimate future of mankind is going to be. We're picturing it here. Still, you have to think, "What can I do to make any difference in any of these situations?" That poses a question for us. What can we do for the world with this calling, right now? Let's turn to 1 Peter 1, I think this scripture has also been mentioned. Remember any scripture we look at has a present and a future meaning. Many, many scriptures are like that.

1 Peter 1:25 *But the word of the LORD endures forever.* [That's a quote from Isaiah 40:8] *Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.* (NKJV)

Due to that context, it goes on in chapter 2 and I'll switch to the NLT.

1 Peter 2:1 *So get rid of all evil behavior. Be done with all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, [He remembered that even amongst the disciples— “Who is the greatest?”] and all unkind speech.*

2) Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment ... (NLT)

When I think of Peter, I always think of the two different individuals. I think of the preconversion Peter and the converted Peter. I think of two different men, when you look at that. We have it in the record, we can see that change. He was shaped by his experience from his calling.

3) now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness.

4) You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people [the Jews then, the world then], but he was chosen by God for great honor.

5) And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. [He does that by calling us, bringing us into His truth, teaching us His way of life] What's more, you are his holy priests. (NLT)

We're going to be—He is building those qualities in us now. We used to think and preach—and it's not wrong—that we were living in a training ground. I tend to think more that it was a proving ground. When you think back to the incident of Abraham and Isaac, what did God say when Abraham passed that test? Now I know you; he proved himself to God, that he would be faithful.

5 continued) ... Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God. (NLT)

These are our lives that are living sacrifices. We see that in other places. That's how God proves us.

6) As the Scriptures say, “I am placing a cornerstone in Jerusalem, chosen for great honor, and anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced.” (NLT)

If we live by the world's standards, we're living in disgrace and it's a pretty disgraceful world out there. That pot shop I talked about, it's bracketed by a Mormon church and a Baptist church. Guess which place has the most cars in the parking lot?

7) Yes, you who trust him recognize the honor God has given him. But for those who reject him, “The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.”

8) *And, “He is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they do not obey God’s word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them. (NLT)*

Fate is the consequence for rejecting God’s way of life.

9) *But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God’s very own possession. [We are a possession because we were bought with a price, with the blood of Jesus Christ] As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. (NLT)*

The jist of that is, as God’s people we should be different, we should set a different example, we should live by different standards reflecting those standards of God’s.

10) *“Once you had no identity as a people [our identity was in the world, we were just of the world]; now you are God’s people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God’s mercy.” [And are we thankful for that]*

11) *Dear friends, I warn you as “temporary residents and foreigners” [we know that this life and everything in it is temporary] to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. (NLT)*

When I read that I always think of Paul speaking to the Ephesians in Ephesians 6 where he talks about the armor of God, of being in warfare.

12) *Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior ... (NLT)*

And where did we learn that behavior? Through our calling, we learned that from God, through His truth; we live it and incorporate it into our lives and into everything that we do.

12 continued) *... and they will give honor to God when he judges the world. (NLT)*

In other words, at some point people are going to recognize the behavior they rejected and maybe these days that they hate. I don’t know if you saw that article recently about some professor. This gentleman came out and you can see what he said and where it was going. He labeled the Republican party (the conservatives) as a cult. Anybody see that article? It’s a very short leap from the Republican party to Christians—very short leap. To be labeled as an evil people—cult-like people. The people would recognize those behaviors at some point because those behaviors are going to come to the forefront during the millennium; that’s God’s plan. Just thinking about that, I’m not a native Vet and wear a cap that says U.S. Navy Veteran on it. Full disclosure, I’m not a combat Veteran like Gordon is. Unless you count some of those Port cities we were in—some of those were pretty dangerous combat zones. I wear the cap because it fits, it’s

one of those caps. There are military sites for ex-military and you can get clothes and whatever you want. People will come up to me all the time and say, “Thank you for your service” and my only response that I can think of is “Thank you for your support. Not everyone appreciates the military.” When you think about that, someday people are going to thank us, and those who reflected that behavior—those Godly behaviors—and lived that kind of life.

13) For the Lord’s sake, submit to all human authority—whether the king as head of state ... (NLT)

Now there’s a spiritual challenge for you. One thing I really appreciate is the picture of the millennium. It’s going to show who’s really in charge. People, even the church will get into political arguments. Have you ever noticed that? We hate to see the things that are happening to our country. I thought it was interesting that Gordon mentioned Christ’s exchange with Pilate. When Pilate said “I have the power to let you go free.” and Christ said “You don’t have any power at all except what God gives you.” It’s all about perspective. People in power now just have power, they are not in charge. You can see that all through the Bible. You can go back to Pharaoh, the most powerful man on earth. Even Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar, those people were in power, they were not in charge. Even Satan—Satan has power, Satan is not in charge, God is in charge. If we keep that perspective, we don’t get caught up in all these political arguments, coming into an election year. Paul takes it as a grind, just to suffer through it.

14) or the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish those who do wrong and to honor those who do right.

15) It is God’s will that your honorable lives should silence those ignorant people who make foolish accusations against you. [Notice it doesn’t say silence with your mouth, rather by your Christian example—your conduct, your behaviors]

16) For you are free, yet you are God’s slaves, so don’t use your freedom as an excuse to do evil. (NLT)

The context here is addressing the slaves-master relationship, but it says in John 8:32 as a reference that the truth shall make you free. I think somebody else touched on that. It means free from the shackles of the world.

17) Respect everyone, and love the family of believers. Fear God, and respect the king.

18) You who are slaves must submit to your masters with all respect. Do what they tell you—not only if they are kind and reasonable, but even if they are cruel.

19) For God is pleased when, conscious of his will, [Doing what’s right based on Godly principles] patiently endure unjust treatment. (NLT)

In other words, it doesn’t mean you’re justified in retaliating. Christ did not leave that kind of example for us. It’s not to say you can’t stand up for yourself at times. But what are the circumstances?

20) *Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. [A lot of times we're abused or we get what we deserve if we do wrong—that's what that is saying] But if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you. (NLT)*

You don't have to be nice, but you do have to be civil. We have to watch our behavior and sometimes our mouths. My wife has a plaque in the kitchen that says,

God please put your arm around my shoulder and your hand across my mouth.

Verse 21—here's the answer.

21) *For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps. (NLT)*

It can't get any clearer or plainer than that. The whole point is we are called to be different and to make a difference in our example. If you look at that word *example* in the Greek, it means "a carbon copy". It also has a sense of "a master artist doing something for his students and expecting his students to duplicate what he made." You remember that narrow way? It can also mean following in Christ's footsteps like a guide. Sometimes if you have to follow a guide on a mountain trail, you have to follow in the exact same footsteps or you're going to fall, you're going to get lost and wander off.

22) *He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone. (NLT)*

We can't say that—not a one of us. I can't say that. If I'm talking to someone and they really think they are a good person and they have never done this or that, I just say let's back up in the conversation a little and proceed honestly. We've all done things.

23) *He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. (NLT)*

Not my first reaction in a carnal sense—it just isn't. I have to think about that pre and post conversion of Peter. He was kind of a rambunctious, in-your-face hothead before he was converted. In spite of all that false vibrato, he denied Christ three times.

23 continued) *... He left his case in the hands of God [we review that every Passover], who always judges fairly.*

24) *He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. (NLT)*

Key phrase there—we are supposed to live for what is right. When we come out of that baptismal, symbolic burial, we start to live right—different than before the burial.

24 continued) *... By his wounds you are healed.*

25) Once you were like sheep who wandered away. But now you have turned to your Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls. (NLT)

In a word, we're called now. The few to be an example, following Christ's example and duplicating those behaviors. A supreme example; we can't get a better example, it's just not there. Just as a reference, in Revelation 1:6 and in Revelation 20:6, it tells us God and Jesus Christ are going to make us kings and priests. That's not a done deal yet—there are conditions to that. Rick talked about that. Another thing too, referring back to that narrow road, James refers to that a lot. Once we start on that narrow road and start down it, we don't say, "Thanks Lord, I get it, I see the light at the end of the tunnel—good enough, I'll just go on my merry way." It doesn't work that way, does it? It's a struggle and a lot of work. We're tested all the time. I always tell people, everything is a test, doesn't matter what it is.

I'll tell a story on us. A month before the Feast, Marie had a mini stroke, we both came home from the hospital with covid. Yesterday we went home, had lunch, Marie took a nap and I'm walking in our kitchen and I see our refrigerator has sprung a leak. It has a water filter on it and we have laminate flooring all through the kitchen and it's all starting to buckle now. Everything is a test. How are we going to handle it? That's what I pray for people when they ask for prayers, I ask God to help them handle it, whatever the outcome may be. God already knows the outcome and He's watching how we handle it. In other words, we have to apply that truth and live a certain way. We have a whole Bible that tells us that—a whole set of scriptures.

That's part of the answer as to why we are called now—to be a Godly example. That's been touched on. How did Rick put that? He used the analogy of a filing system? When you think about that—being a Godly example—the broader context of that is, people are watching what you're doing. The people are watching you here. People walking up and down the hall, the people we deal with for this room—everything—people are watching you and your conduct. Whether we think they are or not. Even your neighbors are watching you. I don't know if you think about that or not. Back in the early '90's we had a house fire. We have a lot of problems—the Elders. It was in December and of course I was at work, they called me and a 911 operator ran me down at work and told me I should probably go home, as my house was burning. I'm coming into town and there was a big plume of smoke. We lived in Richland at the time. I get there, the fire department is there, the police are there, two or three news agencies are there. The first thing when I got there, I couldn't even get to my house when a news reporter came up to me and stuck a camera right in my face asking me questions. He had also interviewed our neighbors and he asked them if our Christmas tree had had caught on fire? They said, "No they don't have a Christmas tree, they are something like 7th Day Adventist." They know we left every Sabbath to go to services and they made that connection. Everybody is watching you; they really are.

We are supposed to be reflecting and representing Christ. We just had that really good sermon by Mark Sappington about being ambassadors for Christ—good point. In the context of doing what Christ would do—someone mentioned this the other day—here are a few, "do we" questions.

Do we help people or hurt people?

Do we condemn people or help people? It doesn't mean condone bad behavior—there's a lot of bad behavior going around.

Do we serve people or expect people to serve us? That harkens back to some old days.

Do we cry for the world or say "They are getting what they deserve"?

I posed a question earlier, what can we do for the world right now with this calling? Let's go to Ephesians 3, Paul has a lot to say about that. He's writing to the church at Ephesus to address the concerns they have for him because of the trouble he has had. Paul is a really good example, in the way he handles things.

Ephesians 3:13 *Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. (NKJV)*

He's doing it in service. He's not only being a living sacrifice in his personal life, he's sacrificing himself for the church as we can see. Over in chapter 4:1-4, again the New King James.

Ephesians 4:1 *I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy [appropriately, in a Godly way] of the calling with which you were called ... (NKJV)*

That calling is that invitation, an authoritative invitation. In my case, I was drafted. I wasn't looking for the church, I was drafted. In the military I volunteered. Paul then reminds them they have a responsibility that comes with that calling. About the way we think, act, and live in a certain way.

2) with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love,

3) endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

4) There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; (NKJV)

When I worked for a corporation, we had 1800 employees and one of the big things the management came up with was multi-tasking. That is just one way of saying, "They are going to pile more work on you every time they get a chance." It started out with 1800 people and they decided they had too many people at our nuclear power plant from which I retired. They did a survey and other plants had 1200 employees so they decided, we need to get rid of 600 people. The point I'm getting to is, they started laying off people. They did it in two ways, one year 300 people, the next year 300 more to get to the 1600 number, and we were asking, "Who is going to take the work load?" Their response was, you are. God doesn't ask us to do that, that's what I'm trying to get at. One body, one spirit, one hope. Not a whole bunch of different things pulling you in 16 different directions, wearing you out trying to keep up. Paul knows they are concerned about him, but he never mentioned himself. He doesn't moan and groan about that.

He's really telling them and us too, what our primary focus should be. He's pointing them in the right direction.

Remember that scripture, we've heard it many times, 1 Corinthians 1:26, "Now you consider your calling". In other words, we see it and respond to it correctly in the way we should. The point is, to walk worthy of our calling from that point of baptism, we have to maintain a kind of spiritual focus. That's what Paul points out. Have you ever noticed how much energy we waste focusing on the wrong things? Damaged floors, sickness, whatever it may be. Covid is a mean thing because you're not sick and you're not well. I'm not sick now but I'm not well either. I know it sounds like I'm making excuses, I'm just trying to let you know what's going on.

In a Dr. Phil interview, I noted one time, someone asked him, what do you tell people who are depressed all the time? Depressed over the bad news going on around them. Dr. Phil said

"You have to compartmentalize, get your focus right. If your focus is on "doom and gloom" all the time, you'll be that way in your life—it will just work that way."

I'm not a big fan of Dr. Phil, but that's pretty good advice for all of us. Have you ever caught yourself focusing on your past regrets and mistakes? The Feast is all about focusing on the future, not the past. You remember when God says—we were probably told this at baptism—that He forgives our sins and mistakes; He doesn't remember or dwell them. He says they are *as far as east is from the west*. Over in Philippians 3 we have Paul's example. I'm always fascinated by what we can learn from Philippians. The church at Philippi was always Paul's favorite church. It wasn't high maintenance like the Corinthian church, the Roman church. They did a lot of things right. They were actually living what they were supposed to be living.

Philippians 3:8 *Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish [one translation says: count them as dung] ... (NKJV)*

He is focused on what's of value and what isn't.

8 continued) ... that I may gain Christ ... (NKJV)

He doesn't mention his trials and suffering and there are a bunch of them. I have a whole list of them. I went through seven chapters one time and listed the troubles and trials Paul had and it's quite a list. It's impressive in a really bad way. Most of us couldn't handle it at all. What he's saying, sounds like a very high level of spiritual focus.

9) and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, [talking about complying through ritual rather than really loving and wanting to

obey God with all our heart] *but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;*
10) *that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,*
11) *if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (NKJV)*

That's the first one that we will all be in at some point.

12) *Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. (NKJV)*

Called us, He laid hold of us. In a sense He kind of jerked us out of the world, if you want to look at it that way. He drafted Paul in a very special way. Somebody mentioned that earlier, it was Gordon this morning. He was called in a certain way—we were all called in a certain way. It has to do with time and place. God doesn't make mistakes. You're not a mistake. I'm not talking about predestination, that's an entirely different subject. We don't believe that anyway. We all responded at a certain place, in our way, at a certain time, just like all the characters—everyone you can think of that we have in scripture. We all had a time and place that we were called.

13) *Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind [in other words he didn't waste time or energy worrying about things in the past, there's no spiritual profit in that] and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,*
14) *I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*
15) *Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.*
16) *Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.*
17) *Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. (NKJV)*

Our walk is how we live, that's our record that we are writing right now with our lives.

18) *For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: (NKJV)*

He's not talking about people who are in the world.

19) *whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things. (NKJV)*

That's where the focus is, that's where our focus was before we were called. Unfortunately, sometimes we'll slip back into that now with our troubles and trials.

20) *For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,*
21) *who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.* (NKJV)

So that God can get it done; He can make that change in us. Another point of focus—Rick touched on this a little, and again there was no collusion, there never is between speakers—sometimes people get all hung up on private interpretation of what the Bible says. That's been going on in the church of God for years and years. People will get into verbal fights and churches split. We won't turn there but you remember the account in John 5:1-15 where it talks about the man who had an infirmity for 38 years when supposedly an angel stirred up the water and whoever was down first into the water was cured of that. That's not mentioned in any other place. What did Jesus do? He didn't condemn him or anything, He just simply healed him with the word. The point I'm trying to make is, we have to remember the record we have in God's Word is very concise. It's not full of the detail that we would sometimes like. Many details are just not recorded for us, they just aren't there. The lesson for us is to focus on what we do know, not burn a whole lot of mental energy speculating on something that is unclear and what that means.

I don't know what it is about human nature—I'm not saying at all that we shouldn't learn things if we can, but we need to be careful doing that. I know people who have spent an enormous amount of time and energy on Christ's return—they just have to know when Christ is going to return. Scripture very plainly says Christ doesn't even know, only the Father knows—but they just have to know. Backpacks, passports in hand ready to go, offshore bank accounts. No offense if somebody has that here. People have almost come to blows over those sorts of things. Paul warned Timothy about that as an experienced minister to one less experienced. He said don't get in embroiled and buried in endless arguments. In his case he was talking about genealogies because that was a big thing back then. I'm of Abraham, I'm of this line and all that. Ephesians 1, here's what Paul taught. Genuine understanding only comes from God. Maybe I will rephrase that a little differently, genuine spiritual understanding only comes from God. Ephesians 1:17-18, New King James, breaking in on the context.

Ephesians 1:17 *that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,*
18) *the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints ...* (NKJV)

The point is spiritual understanding of any value only comes from God. There's only one right answer to a spiritual question. That has to come from God and that's what God holds us responsible for—what we know. God watches what we do with the knowledge and understanding He gives us. He's judging us on that. It's interesting the revelation that Paul talks about here. He gives us what we need and isn't it logical to assume—

maybe “assume” is the wrong word—that God also watches what we do with what He doesn’t give us? Are we going to make up stuff to fill in the gaps that God doesn’t fill? Paul says to be content with what we have and of course he’s talking about physical things and monetary things, but if you look up the word for “*be content*” it can mean “satisfied”. Are you satisfied with what you have? Are we satisfied with what God gives us?

It seems to me we have plenty to do. I’m not saying it’s wrong to learn something. Ephesians 2:8-10.

Ephesians 2:8 *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,*
9) *not of works, lest anyone should boast.* (NKJV)

You ever notice how people boast when they come up with a new truth? Look what I found, or look what God revealed to me.

10) *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works [bearing fruit for God], which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.* (NKJV)

We are called to focus on Jesus Christ and our Christian walk. We can burn up an enormous amount of energy on a number of things, if we want. Have you ever thought about the seven churches in Revelation 3 and the terms of focus? I know the different theories, errors, attitudes, characteristics—just going quickly down through the first church mentioned in Revelation 2, the church at Ephesus. It says they lost focus on *their first love*. You remember the sermons we used to get on “Recapturing your first love”? You’re not supposed to recapture your first love. That’s not what it’s talking about; read the context. What was it they lost focus on?—backing up a little bit, when we were first called, we wanted to know everything. Paul even mentioned that, how careful we were when we were first called, that first love when we were first baptized. In my case, I was so zealous at first that I even asked a minister, what is this fasting thing? I’ve never heard of this fasting thing, so he sent me a paper on fasting. So, the first thing I did was start fasting and got sick. They had forgotten that zeal and that first love; they didn’t repent. Read the whole context of that. It’s not about first love, it’s about what they lost. They were slipping spiritually.

The second church, Smyrna, focused on *persecution*. The third one, Pergamum, focused on *wrong doctrines*. The fourth one, Thyatira, focused on *a false prophet*—in other words they were following and listening to people. Sardis, lost their spiritual focus *to the point that they were dying spiritually*. Things were really slipping. Philadelphia, they had a right focus—Paul’s favorite church. Laodicea, they lost focus *on the kind of Christians they should be*. They were lukewarm, they were indifferent. Think they were good examples? Probably not. I’ve heard some even use the excuse, this is the Laodicean era—the church used to teach eras. I heard one person said, “I’m thankful it’s the Laodicean era and I’m thankful to be a Laodicean.” The trouble I’ve always had

with eras—I'm not countering that at all—if you just focus on eras and you think you're in a certain era, that's a given. In other words, you're basically stuck. If you are in a Laodicean era, you're a Laodicean and stuck there. If you approach it from an idea of being in an era. If you read Revelation 2 and 3 carefully, it doesn't say that. He's talking about bad behaviors. Not everyone fell into them, it wasn't a dominant problem or a 100% problem. That wouldn't mean that if you are in a certain area, the rest of God's word is meaningless. It's always interesting to me the way God inspired the endings of these messages to the seven churches.

Revelation 3:18 *I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire [Godly character], that you may be rich [spiritually]; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.* (NKJV)

That's talking about fixing your focus. The point is, if we lose that spiritual focus we gradually drift away. I remember a story I heard of two couples who were vacationing in Florida on the gulf side, that's where the good beaches are—miles and miles of white good beaches. The guys—the macho guys—rent some surf boards and paddle out, I've done that before in Hawaii in the Navy, you're wading on waves, you're warm, the water is rocking you up and down and you can fall asleep on a surf board. In my case I woke up and there were sharks all around me. Anyway, they fell asleep and started drifting out and when they woke up (this is just a story) they were a long way from shore. They didn't know if they could get back, they had drifted so far. Fortunately for them, the locals helped them. Somebody saw them, took a boat and went out and got them and told them, "If you get out too far and get caught in that current, they will never find you—you'll die."

Referring back to David's sermonette, another part of our calling is holding onto God's truth. I try to touch on this one briefly. A short list of truth and I think David probably used some of these. John 4:23-24, we probably all know this one by heart. These are Christ's words.

John 4:23 *But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.* (NKJV)

That Greek word *worship* means "to adore"; in other words, central to our thinking, central to our focus. That's expressed how? In the way we live. It's an internal process. Just a reference, you remember David in Psalm 51:6 where he is pleading with God and recognized that God wanted him to have truth—in other words a part of him. Then over in Ephesians 6, part of the armor of God...

Ephesians 6:13 *Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day ...* (NKJV)

Isn't that accelerating these days? More and more evil every day; every day you wake up. What is it now, 35 states in the United States that are not safe to live in. Our claim to fame in Washington is Seattle, one of the highest crime cities in the U.S. right now.

13 continued) ... and having done all, to stand.

14) Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth ... (NKJV)

That's an interesting analogy. Talking about the waist, you have to have that core strength—as a golfer I can't golf without some core strength. It's been that way with exercise too, you have to have that core strength to exercise properly. Spiritually, you have to have that core strength whichever way you are turning. So that's an interesting part of that picture of the armor. Over in Isaiah 2, part of what we are picturing here, Isaiah 2:2, a very futuristic scripture and we love these during the Feast.

Isaiah 2:2 *Now it shall [note that word, it's not a maybe or possibility] come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the LORD's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. (NKJV)*

One translation says, *will stream to it like a massive river, seeking God's truth and way of life*—what we are living now, the example we are presenting to the world now. I'm going to skip to 2 Peter 1, I think we read part of this before. Jump down to verse 9.

2 Peter 1:9 *For he who lacks these things is shortsighted [referring to focus], even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. (NKJV)*

Far too many have done that.

*10) Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things, you will never stumble;
11) for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (NKJV)*

We're wrapping up the point, we are called to make a difference now and in the future. What we do now is going to carry over into the future. So, let's keep the Feast and remember, focus on our calling, hold onto the truth, be a good example and look forward to the future.