

The Time of Testing and Judgment

James Smyda

Recorded on October 7, 2023

As most of you know, who've heard my sermons over the years, I've been in the church since the day I was born. So, I've been attending the Feast of Tabernacles for over 50 years—it's getting kind of close to 60 these days. As a result, I've had the opportunity to listen to a lot of sermons over the years that address the meaning of the 8th day. I'm sure that most of you have had the same type of experience. I have to say, the vast majority of all those sermons I've heard over the years typically focus on two major themes. One of them is a physical resurrection. In other words, the resurrection described in Ezekiel 37 actually takes place in the time period pictured by the 8th day and the other is what I like to call an easy, comfortable slide into the Kingdom of God. The majority of those sermons focused on this is the time when all of your relatives and friends who have not had the opportunity to receive salvation, get brought up and have their opportunity but for them it's going to be this easy, comfortable situation and a wonderful utopia, they won't have to overcome Satan or deal with suffering and it will just be this warm fuzzy story and they slide into the Kingdom of God. That is an emotionally satisfying scenario, but what we are going to see today is that neither of those themes is correct.

Don't get me wrong, this day does picture the time when the rest of mankind has their opportunity for salvation and they receive their judgment to determine whether they are in the Kingdom of God. That is very much the meaning of this day. But what we're going to see is, these two major themes:

The idea that the physical resurrection takes place during the time frame pictured by the 8th day.

This concept of an easy, comfortable slide into the Kingdom of God,

Actually, neither is correct. I'm sure some of you out there hearing this sermon are probably shocked to hear me say that. Let me request up front, before I get started, that you practice Proverbs 18:13—*He who answers a matter before he hears it, it's folly and shame unto him*—and hear the matter before you answer it. Hear what I have to present and see if it matches scripture.

If you would like a title for the sermon, it's:

The Time of Testing and Judgement

As I mentioned, this day very much is about when the rest of mankind who did not receive their opportunity of salvation as Firstfruits, have their opportunity to determine by their behavior, whether they are going to be in the Kingdom of God. Whether they are going to obey God and endure to the end and make it into the Kingdom of God or

whether they are going to rebel and do their own thing—that is very much what this day is about. These two major themes of a physical resurrection and an easy slide into the Kingdom of God, unfortunately neither is correct. What we're going to do is address that today and illustrate it from the Bible.

As you know, the physical resurrection we associate with Ezekiel 37 and that is correct, we're going to look at that today, but if you ask most church members, "Why do you place the resurrection described in Ezekiel 37 as taking place during the 8th day period." They aren't going to turn to Ezekiel 37 and make that argument from the context of that chapter. That's not where they are going to go. They are going to turn to Revelation 20 and read you the statement about the rest of the dead and say this is what requires Ezekiel 37 to take place in the 8th day period. That's how everybody makes the argument. I have to say for most of my life I did exactly the same thing. Until I dug into more detail to understand exactly what Revelation 20 is talking about, because there is nothing in those scriptures that dictates when the physical resurrection takes place. What we need to understand are the two terms, *first resurrection* and the term *rest of the dead*.

What I'm going to give you today is just a brief overview summary of what I covered in a sermon last year not long after the Feast. It's on our website, it's on our YouTube channel and goes into this in much more detail than what I'm going to have time to cover today. If you want to look at all the finer details, the sermon is titled, The First Resurrection and the Rest of the Dead, because it's focused on those two terms and explaining the concepts associated with them. But today we are going to see a brief overview of it. So turn to Revelation 20—this is where everybody bases their argument on when they want to place Ezekiel 37 and that resurrection.

Revelation 20:4 *And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (NKJV)*

Obviously, we are talking about the Firstfruits who have received eternal life and are reigning with Christ. Verse 5 is the core of this argument.

5) *But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. (NKJV)*

We're going to dig into this—I'm just going to cover a brief summary because there won't be time to cover all the details. If this is new information to you, I highly recommend listening to that sermon because it will cover this in greater detail. Let's first of all start with this term "first resurrection". The assumption is normally made that this means "first" *in time order*. If you've ever noticed in church of God culture, we have two other terms that are not in the Bible in at all. We made them up. The terms *2nd resurrection* and *3rd resurrection*. Try to find them in the Bible some time. I'll give you a

spoiler alert, you'll be searching for the rest of your life because they are not there. They are just made-up terms. I understand the logic of why they were made up because I believed this too. I'm not trashing anybody; I was guilty myself. But there is a logic behind all of this. If you assume that first resurrection means first in time order, if you have first you have to have a second—that wouldn't make any sense without that—and then once you bought that, third makes sense too because you have a first in time order. Let's ask a question: The resurrection described here, would this be the first time that a physical human being lived and died and then was resurrected? No, there's tons of examples in the Bible in both the Old and New Testament of people being resurrected. We couldn't even argue that that's the first time it's ever happened, as that would be ridiculous. Now you could say, this is different—and it is different because most of those examples I'm referring to are people being resurrected back to physical life. It's not about receiving eternal life, it's just a physical resurrection in those examples and that would be true. Now let's ask the question, would this be the first time that a physical human being lived, died and then was resurrected to eternal life? No, because what is one of the titles of Jesus Christ? Firstborn from the dead. He's the first one who lived and died as a human being and was resurrected to eternal life. So we can't argue that this is first in time order by any definition. So, what else might this mean? We have to consider that the logic doesn't work for "first" in time order. What else might the Bible be referring to?

If we look at the meaning of the Greek word, it's transliterated in English as *protos*, Strong's #4413. The definition I'm going to give you comes from The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament by Spiros Zodhiates. I'm only going to read you a short section of Zodhiates definition of this word. To be totally thorough and accurate, this word can mean "first" in time order—I want to be clear about that, it's one of the possibilities of what it can mean. But again, the logic doesn't really work. So, we have to think, what else could it mean? Could it have figurative meanings? Yes, it can. Here's what Zodhiates says in this regard:

Figuratively of rank, dignity, meaning first, chief.

Ok, if it's first in dignity, honor, chief, kind of the primary, in what context could that mean? There has to be a context of comparison involved here for it to be the primary. It has to be compared to something. All we have to do is look at the trend of how the Bible speaks of resurrections and take the context of the Bible to interpret it and we'll see a very clear explanation. Look to John 5:28.

John 5:28 *Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice
29) and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. (NKJV)*

What we're going to notice is that multiple times in the Bible, these are always spoken of together; the resurrection to eternal life and the resurrection to condemnation and the lake of fire. If you go back and listen to the sermon, I mentioned that I gave last year,

I'm not going to cover this part today but I go into Matthew 13, the parable of the wheat and tares in that sermon. I mention how it describes spiritual judgment as an agricultural harvest with that analogy and it says at the time of the harvest. In other words, together in the same time frame, what happens? You deal with the wheat and the tares. The wheat—the righteous receive the resurrection of eternal life, the tares go into the lake of fire, the resurrection to condemnation and the lake of fire. There are two options for everybody. The movie ends in one of two ways, you either make it into the Kingdom of God, or you make it into the lake of fire—that's everybody's ultimate end. You're going to see this mentioned multiple times. there's a trend of several scriptures here. Now turn to Acts 24, we're going to see these paired together—it's how resurrections are typically talked about in the Bible. Particularly when we're talking about spiritual judgement.

Acts 24:15 *I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. (NKJV)*

Where do the “just” go? They receive the resurrection to eternal life. The unjust, the condemnation to the lake of fire; that's how the movie ends for everybody and notice how these are paired together. Now turn to Daniel 12 and we're going to see this again.

Daniel 12:1 *At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, Even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, Every one who is found written in the book.
2) And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt. (NKJV)*

As I explained in more detail in the sermon, “The First Resurrection and the Rest of the Dead”, what the Hebrew means *for everlasting contempt* is everlasting abhorrence. In other words, people who are condemned to the lake of fire. So, what do you have? Resurrection to eternal life or resurrection to condemnation and the lake of fire. That is how the movie ultimately ends for everybody. That's how spiritual judgment is done and the Bible uses the analogy of a harvest in describing it. How does a farmer do a harvest? It's in our 1st, 2nd, and 3rd theory that we have made up in the church of God, that we've separated the wheat they are in the first resurrection and the tares are in the 3rd. Okay, is that how a farmer does the harvest? Do they harvest the good crop today and then throw away the waste 1000 years later? No, a farmer does the harvest and they naturally do the good crop and the waste together—that's just how you do a harvest. If you listen to the sermon, I cover Matthew 13 and it says at the time of the harvest, this is what happens. It's just like an agricultural harvest.

If we look at the context the Bible uses—not our human reasoning—how the Bible speaks of the resurrections; it speaks of them together. Which one would you call the primary, the chief, the one first in rank and honor? That would be the resurrection to eternal life. The key to understanding the term *first resurrection*—it's not 1st, 2nd, and 3rd and that's why you don't see those terms in the Bible, we made them up, they are

not there, you'll search for the rest of your life—you won't find them. We misunderstood what *first resurrection* meant. It's just another way of saying "resurrection to eternal life."

Now let's turn back to Revelation 20. Again, what I'm giving you today is a very abbreviated version of the other sermon that goes into much more detail of every nuance of these verses in Revelation. I'm just giving you the overview today. I'm going to start at the very end of verse 4 and into verse 5 because we need to understand this term *rest of the dead* because ask anybody in the church of God why you place the Ezekiel 37 resurrection in the 8th day, Last Great Day period, they are not going to make the argument from Ezekiel 37, they are going to turn to Revelation 20 and read verse 5 and say, the *rest of the dead* is why—that's the argument. Once we realize that's not even what this verse is talking about, then that argument is gone. This is going to be out of the New King James and you'll understand in a minute why I'm mentioning the translation. The very end of the sentence in verse 4.

Revelation 20:4 ...*And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.* (NKJV)

Obviously, we're talking about the Firstfruits.

5) But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. (NKJV)

Notice here, that when it says this is the first resurrection, it's stated after the rest of the dead are mentioned. It's listed as if these two groups are included in that definition and we're about to see, they are. Let me read to you how the same thing I just read is translated in the New Revised Standard version because it's not just a translation issue, it's a manuscript issue. The King James and the New King James and a few other translations have it translated as *lived again*. In other words, you are repeating something you've done previously and that's because they are using manuscripts that have the Greek word *anazao* in there. There are other Bible manuscripts that most of your other translations are based on where it's the Greek word *zao* and that's why it's going to read differently. I'm going to explain in a minute what this is about. I'm going to read that same section from the New Revised Standard Version and pay attention how it's worded.

4) ... they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (NRSV)

Obviously referring to the Firstfruits. Now verse 5.

5) But the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. (NRSV)

Notice the concept of *again* does not appear.

5 continued) ... This is the first resurrection. (NRSV)

The key here is the Greek word *zao*; we know for a fact that's used in verse 4. There are different manuscripts that would debate which one is the correct word in verse 5. If you listen to the sermon that I mentioned I gave last year I go more into all the nuances of these verses and build a stronger case for this. I think it makes more sense to place the word *zao* there if you put it all together. Let's consider the ramifications of that. Notice the wording, *came to life*, in verse 4 and in verse 5 it says *come to life*. If they are both *zao*—let me read part of Zodhiates on the meaning of the word *zao*. It's transliterated into English as *zao* and is Strong's #2198. To be thorough, this word can mean physical life, it can also mean spiritual life. I'm going to read this section how he defines it in regards to spiritual life.

In the sense of to exist, in an absolute sense with no end; not and hereafter to live forever.

In other words, to have eternal life. We know for a fact, *zao* in verse 4, that's obviously what it's referring to because it's talking about the Firstfruits.

They came to life and reigned with Christ for 1000 years.

They received the resurrection to eternal life and they are reigning as God beings with Christ throughout the millennium. Now let's give *zao* the exact same meaning in verse 5 that we know it has in verse 4.

The rest of the dead did not come to eternal life until the 1000 years were finished, this is the first resurrection."

This is the resurrection to eternal life. *The rest of the dead* is not any statement that dictates when the physical resurrection takes place because all it's telling us is there are two groups who receive the resurrection to eternal life. There are the Firstfruits and they receive it at the blowing of the 7th trumpet and then there is the rest of mankind who at the end of the 8th day—we're going to read later in this sermon in Matthew 25, when Christ separated the sheep from the goats, the sheep receive the resurrection to eternal life, the goats go to the lake of fire. All we're saying is first resurrection means resurrection to eternal life, there are two groups who receive it. The Firstfruits and then the other is the rest of mankind. That's what these verses are talking about. They in no way dictate when the physical resurrection takes place. That's the entire argument for placing Ezekiel 37 in the 8th day period.

Now let's turn to Ezekiel and read the context. If we just read the context, it tells us a different story. Ezekiel 37 follows right after Ezekiel 36 and I'm not going to take the time to read all of Ezekiel 36 but if you read through that, it's an overview of Israel's history. It refers to when God worked with them previously as a nation and they rebelled and got scattered out of their land. Then it refers to God bringing them back together, restoring them in the land, obviously referring to the beginning of the millennium. We'll

read the latter part of verse 33, I just want you to read the context that leads into chapter 37 and if we just accept that context, it makes it obvious where these fits.

Ezekiel 36:33 *“On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will also enable you to dwell in the cities, and the ruins shall be rebuilt.*

34) The desolate land shall be tilled instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass by.

35) So they will say, ‘This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.’ (NKJV)

Notice the earth is like a Garden of Eden, as I covered earlier this Feast—that’s the millennium. You take the ruined earth and now it’s all replenished in this beautiful setting, that’s what we’re talking about.

36) Then the nations which are left all around you shall know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted what was desolate. I, the LORD, have spoken it, and I will do it.”

37) Thus says the Lord GOD: “I will also let the house of Israel inquire of Me to do this for them: I will increase their men like a flock.

38) Like a flock offered as holy sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem on its feast days, so shall the ruined cities be filled with flocks of men. Then they shall know that I am the LORD.” ’ ’ ” (NKJV)

We’re obviously referring to Israel being restored to the land in the millennium, we have a millennial earth—it’s like a Garden of Eden—this is the context that leads into the beginning of chapter 37. If we rely on context, this places it into the millennium. Now let’s read verse 1 in chapter 37.

Ezekiel 37:1 *The hand of the LORD came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. (NKJV)*

Let me make another side note so we understand verse 14 when we get to it. When it refers to the Spirit of Yehovah, the Hebrew word for *spirit* is *ruah* and in some Lexicon’s it’s *ruach*—some Lexicon’s put in a “c”, others don’t—it’s just how they try to put it into English. Either way it’s the same Hebrew word. This Hebrew word can mean “spirit”, it can also mean “breath” or “breathe”. It can have multiple applications and the way you determine which one is correct is by context. If you read through this, what I’m going to point out is that this word is used multiple times in the next 14 verses but most of the time it’s not translated as *spirit*, so when you read it in English you miss that whole significance. Realize, it’s translated as *breath* or *breathe* 8 times in the verse that we’re going to read over. Every time you read the word *breath* or *breathe*, it’s the exact same Hebrew word and that’s going to become significant when we get to verse 14.

- 2) Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and indeed they were very dry.
- 3) And He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" So I answered, "O Lord GOD, You know."
- 4) Again He said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!
- 5) Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: "Surely I will cause breath [that's *ruah*, same Hebrew word] to enter into you, and you shall live. (NKJV)

They received breath, then they lived.

- 6) I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath [*ruah*] in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the LORD."'"
- 7) So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone.
- 8) Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath [*ruah*] in them.
- 9) Also He said to me, "Prophecy to the breath [*ruah*], prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath [*ruah*], Thus says the Lord GOD: "Come from the four winds, O breath [*ruah*], and breathe [*ruah*] on these slain, that they may live." ' ' "
- 10) So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.
- 11) Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!"
- 12) Therefore prophecy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.
- 13) Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves.
- 14) I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it," says the LORD. ' ' (NKJV)

The reason I pointed that out along the way by saying its *ruah* again, it's used a total of 10 times in these 14 verses. The first one we saw is obviously referring to spirit because he says, I was in the Spirit of Yehovah. He is receiving a supernatural vision, so this is a spiritual thing. The other 8 times that we read it between there, it means "breath" or "breathe". Notice the trend was, He's going to put "breath" in them—the breath of life—they are going to come to life and then He's going to work with them. Now let's look at verse 14, even though it says *My Spirit* there, ask what actually makes sense in the context. *Ruah* you figure out from context whether it's "breath" or "breathe" or whether it's "spirit" because it's the same Hebrew word. *I will put My Spirit in you and you shall live and I will place you in your land.* Does it make sense that He's going to put the Holy Spirit into them before they even come back to life and before they get a place to live?

Does that make sense? Is that how conversion works? Or is it that you have to learn God's way and you have to understand the basics of the truth and realize you have to repent of your sins, then have time to repent and be baptized and then receive the Holy Spirit. Isn't that how it works? It doesn't make sense. We'll convert them before they're even alive and have a place to live. That doesn't make any sense. It's a translation error. What He is saying is,

"I'll breathe the breath of life into them, they will come to life
and I'll give them a place to live."

Don't get me wrong, the whole purpose of bringing them back to life is to offer them their chance at salvation—that's the ultimate purpose here. But they have to go through the same process as everybody else. They have to come to understand the truth, they have to realize they have to repent of their sins, they have to go through that whole process and be baptized and then receive the Holy Spirit. It's not going to instantaneously happen from the moment they're brought up—that doesn't even make common sense. Understand when you read this, oftentimes we read over that verse and just assume, He's resurrecting them and giving them the Holy Spirit and don't think it through—does it make sense the way this is worded? No, it doesn't and that is the ultimate purpose of bringing them back up but that's not what verse 14 is talking about.

What you can see, if we just place the physical resurrection here in the context in which it's stated, it indicates it's a millennial setting where this takes place because how do we make the argument that says, it has to be in the 8th day? We make that from Revelation 20:5 when it talks about the rest of the dead and that's not even talking about this. That's talking about those who will receive eternal life later. So we made up a scenario and a timeline that doesn't really work. We also made up a term called 2nd resurrection and that's normally what you hear on the 8th day—that's the 2nd resurrection—try to find that term in the Bible, you'll be searching for the rest of your life. It's simply not there, we made it up. I'm not condemning anybody, I used the term myself for decades, I'm just as guilty as anybody so I'm not condemning anyone in that regard, I'm just saying we have to be honest with what scripture says.

There's another major problem that happens with sermons that address the meaning of the 8th day because we don't just place the physical resurrection in the 8th day, it's normally followed by lots of warm, fuzzy emotional stories how for all your relatives and friends who come up, it's going to be a wonderful, physical utopia, they won't have to overcome Satan, they won't have to suffer, they are going to have a comfortable, easy slide into the Kingdom of God. This comes about because in my history of the church of God, all of my life, we've ignored the release of Satan. If we didn't ignore it, we tried to minimize it and push it in the corner out of the way. Turn to Revelation 20 and take a little more honest look at this one. This is actually addressing the fulfillment of the Day of Atonement.

Revelation 20:1 *Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.*

*2) He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;
3) and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while. (NKJV)*

We focus on the binding of Satan because this is what allows this wonderful utopian environment that we read about during the millennium—that is so wonderful and it is, it's a great thing to look forward to—and we just brush right over that he must be released again. We minimize it and push it to the side, not that anyone ever says this, but we treat it like he gets out a little later and the guards weren't paying attention and he escapes for a little while and we have to get him back into prison and make it all go away and there's no real significance. Notice, it says he must be released and the answer to "Why?" is extremely simple. It's the exact same reason why we all have to deal with him today. It accomplishes the exact same purpose; there is no mystery. I'm going to get a little ahead of a quote I'm about to read. The reason that people struggle to deal with this subject is not because it is complex, it is because it is emotionally unsatisfying. You'll understand in a minute, I'm stealing that from a quote from one of my favorite authors, but I'll get to that in a minute.

Go down to verse 7. We've already looked at verses 4-6, we know that is referring to the millennial reign and the Firstfruits reigning with Christ. But now let me make another observation. I'll be up front and honest, I'm going to be a bit sarcastic in how I'm going to illustrate a point, but I'm doing this for a reason—to drive a point home. Most of my life growing up in the church of God, if the release of Satan wasn't entirely ignored, it was very much minimized and made insignificant and we often placed it in a timeframe that was somehow supposed to be after the millennium, but before the 8th day period. We had this scenario where we placed the physical resurrection on the 8th day and had it in our minds that Satan was just completely out of the picture before it starts. So, everyone else just has this comfortable, easy slide into the Kingdom of God. Here's where I'm going to have a little fun and be a little sarcastic.

As I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon, I've been keeping the Feast of Tabernacles for over 50 years and it's getting close to 60 these days, but I've noticed a 100% trend in all those years. Every single year when I get to sundown on the 7th day of the Feast of Tabernacles, I find myself in the 8th day. I have never once gotten to sundown on the 7th day of the Feast of Tabernacles and thought, I'm in the time frame between the end of the Feast and before the 8th day. Because there's not one. When you get to the end of the Feast, where are you? You hit sundown and "Bam!" you're in the 8th day. You look at all the other Holy Days that are laid out, I'm sure God strategically did the timing of the fall Holy Days—I can't say that I have the answers as to why—but we have Trumpets, then multiple days gap before we get to Atonement. Then we have Atonement and multiple days gap before we get to the Feast. I don't suggest I have all the answers for all that happens there, but I know that God is very strategic and very purposeful and I'm sure when it's all done, we're going to realize that's why you put those days in there, because they have meaning. Again, you get to

sundown on the 7th day of the Feast of Tabernacles and where are you? You are in the 8th day, there is not a gap. That's was just a way that we made up an emotionally satisfying conclusion. Notice verse 7 of Revelation 20.

7) Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison

8) and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. (NKJV)

Notice he is released when? As soon as the 1000 years—as soon as the millennium—is over. His release is concurrent with the period of the 8th day. There isn't a mystery as to why if we simply pay attention to what the New Testament tells us about salvation. We're going to look briefly at a number of scriptures in this regard today; I'm only going to scratch the surface. I gave a sermon after the Feast last year called, Framing the Picture of Prophecy and in fact there is a paper on our website with the same title and it's more extensive than the sermon. The whole point of the paper and sermon is that when we try to develop a prophetic scenario, if we take foundational doctrine that is easy to nail down—it's clear and straightforward—with a mountain of scriptures that all back it up, and we use that as the frame of the picture—take our prophetic scenario—and assume from the beginning that whatever scenario we come up with has to fit inside the frame, it can't reject basic foundational doctrine. Sometimes that's how we can get way out on a limb. Prophecy is inherently a more murky, speculative subject and sometimes we're making our best guess as to how to put it together and look at it without first framing the picture with the foundational, clear stuff that's easy to interpret. It's very straightforward and not symbolic, murky language when trying to interpret what it is—if you frame it with that and assume whatever scenario we get has to fit inside that, that clarifies a great deal of issues. The reason I say that is, if you look through the New Testament, you're going to see a very clear picture. We're going to touch on some of these scriptures today.

Narrow and difficult is the way that leads to life and there are few who find it.

Through much tribulation we enter the Kingdom of God.

All who want to live Godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution.”

We're going to read all three of those scriptures in a minute. That just scratches the surface, there is scripture after scripture that all say that. Then you look and ask, how would all this go away?

Let me back up and tell you my journey of how I discovered this. If you watch Pacific regularly at all, you may have noticed in this past month we replayed a couple of sermons I gave 13 years ago. They were filmed in 2010; in fact, a lot of friends of mine were joking that I got younger. It's because they were filmed 13 years ago. The sermons address the book of Job; I did a thorough study in the book of Job. As I was

working on part 2 and digging into it, I only briefly addressed some of this in the actual sermon because when you research a sermon like that, you learn a lot more than you have to address in an hour. I started noticing that everywhere throughout the New Testament, the subject of suffering and having to endure through that and how God tests us and develops this character in us—this is a very consistent theme throughout the Bible.

I started noticing there are numerous scriptures that make dogmatic, all-encompassing statements that this is simply how the process of salvation and refining our character works and it applies to everyone. We're going to touch on some of those scriptures today. I started scratching my head and said, "Something is wrong." In fact, at the Feast in 2010, one of my best friends—he was an Elder as well as one of the individuals who ordained me—we had been very good friends for years (he's been deceased now for a number of years) but I was having dinner with him and his wife in Kellogg, Idaho and I looked at him—his name was Harold—and I said:

"Harold something is wrong. We teach a prophetic scenario where the majority of mankind has an easy slide into the Kingdom of God and that doesn't match the New Testament. Everything in the New Testament says it's a difficult struggle, that God uses these struggles to build His character in us, to test us and to refine us and that's how the whole process works. It's a very easy case to make. But I can't find a single scripture that this only applies to just a small portion of mankind and everybody else gets to skip that. I can't find any scriptures that define this easy path to salvation. Where is that?"

That led me on a journey of digging into this and by 2011 I had kind of sorted out some of the answers. Over the past 12 years I've had a chance to discuss this with a number of long-term members and even a number of ministers. What I've noticed is a very clear trend—where I refer to the "emotional satisfying part"—and we're going to get to the quote where I pulled that from in a moment—the counter argument always appeals to emotion. In 12 years, not once has anyone ever come to me with the Bible and said let me show you the scriptures that define how God builds our character without having to be tried by fire, without having to suffer and endure to the end. Here's the scripture that defines that or even allows for an exception to all these other verses and allows for a comfortable, easy slide into the Kingdom of God. Not once has anyone ever attempted that. They always make the counter argument from emotion. I'll word it the way one minister put it to me—this is a long-term Elder in the church of God, I won't mention any names—but I was discussing the subject with him and presented the concept and he was kind of very offended by me bringing this up. He looked at me and scolded me and said "This is so negative; God's way is positive". In other words, he was saying, "God's way feels good. It's the misunderstanding that Godly love is about the question, "Does it feel good?" That is completely wrong, it's about "Does it do good?"

Just think about it. Why would a loving God create the Day of the Lord—something that is so horrific that it's hard to wrap your head around? He doesn't do it because it *feels good*. You can't read through the book of Job and say a loving God put this guy through

this when he says he is *a blameless and upright man who fears God and shuns evil*. If he's all about *feel good*, this doesn't work. He didn't do it for that reason, he did it because it *does good*. Because it tested this man, it built his character and proved his loyalty. That is what this is about. The simple answer to this is there is only one path to salvation. There is not this easy path for the rest of mankind and the hard part only applies to the Firstfruits. Everybody else has an easy slide into the Kingdom of God. That does not match the New Testament, it's just an *emotionally satisfying conclusion*.

Now let me give you the quote where I keep saying that from and why I pulled that. One of my favorite authors is Dr. Thomas Sole—I think a lot of you that have listened to my sermons over the years notice I periodically quote him. He's a PhD in economics and a former professor, but he's also been considered kind of the influential guru of conservative commentators and thoughts. I'd like to read to you a quote from him that really sums up my experience with this subject.

The reasons so many people misunderstand so many issues, is not because these issues are so complex, but that people do not want a factual or analytical explanation that leaves them emotionally unsatisfied.

That's what I've noticed when I address this subject. Nobody ever opens the Bible and says, here are the scriptures that do that, they just tell me how this is *emotionally unsatisfying* and therefore can't be true. The Bible tells us that we don't lead the world in understanding, we have to follow what scripture says. So, let's take a brief overview of some of the scriptures that define this process to salvation. I'm only going to scratch the surface of what I covered in the sermon last year, particularly with what the paper on the website covers. It's called, *Framing the Picture of Prophecy* and because I have dealt with the emotional arguments for so many years, when I wrote that paper, I literally went through the Bible and tried to find every clear scripture on the subject and I tried to work every single one of them into the paper because I wanted to make the argument so overwhelming that someone with common sense couldn't disregard it. Turn to Matthew 7:13.

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

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

Notice, it is *the way that leads to life*. It doesn't say,

“This is the path that just applies to the minority of mankind but everybody else gets an easy slide.”

That's not what it says. It says that the way that leads to life is narrow, it's difficult, it's a struggle, you have to endure through it. Rick told a joke during announcements that:

The highway to hell and the stairway to heaven can speak to the

expectation of traffic.

That comes right out of this verse. You'll see this numerous times in the Bible—*many are called, few are chosen*. Often times we do mental gymnastics to get an *emotionally satisfying conclusion* and say that is just referring to the Firstfruits who are called at this time. That's not what those verses are saying in context. It's saying that many are given the opportunity and few endure to the end and stick to the path—that's what they are saying.

To cover another similar scripture, turn to Acts 14—very common scripture that everyone is familiar with, but unfortunately because of the *emotionally satisfying* concept, we often only apply it to the Firstfruits.

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, "We must [notice "must"] through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."* (NKJV)

In other words, the path to the Kingdom of God requires *suffering and enduring*. This is why it says *that he who endures to the end is he who is saved*. If it's all just an experience and a comfortable utopia and is feel good and positive, do you have to endure through that? Is it a struggle? No, because this is what is required for salvation. Let me turn to one of my favorite scriptures on this one. This is always the one I use in arguing this subject. 2 Timothy 3:12; this is the all-encompassing statement we cannot get around.

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

As I've said many times over the past 12 years, I can't find the asterisk next to it that says,

"We're just referring to the smallest portion of mankind, all the rest don't have to suffer, it's comfortable and easy because God is love."

I can't find that exception. If you think it through, is there any other name by which you can be saved? No, everybody has to accept Christ and follow Christ. So, everybody who follows Christ, what are they going to do? They are going to have to suffer persecution. Who does the Bible say is our persecutor? Satan. So, everybody has to overcome, that is simply how the process is built. This is not because God is mean, it's because it accomplishes a functional purpose. As we read in Revelation 20:3, he must be released for a short time. "Must" is because of the functional purpose that this creates. Notice in Romans 5:3.

Romans 5:3 *And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;
4) and perseverance, character; and character, hope. (NKJV)*

In other words, having to endure through persecutions, having to struggle to obey God, that develops His character in us. It's just exercise. If you work out and you're fighting against that resistance, what does it do? Builds muscle. If we just sit on the couch in a comfortable situation all the time, we get flabby. That doesn't build muscle or develop us—an athlete has to train; they have to strive against things that are hard. Character works the same way. Turn to James 1:2.

James 1:2 *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,
3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.
4) But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (NKJV)*

In other words, it's very hard for us as physical human beings—myself included—when you're going through a nasty trial, to say "This is joy, it's wonderful." No, it's "God could you please take this away, I don't enjoy this, it's not fun." That's what we all do, I do myself as well. Why does a loving God put us through that? Because it builds His character in us. It's not about does it *feel good*, it's about does it *do good*. He doesn't put us through it to be mean or be bad to us, He does it out of love knowing that if He puts us through difficult circumstances, it helps us build His character and tests our hearts. This is how He tests us. Turn to Proverbs 17:3.

Proverbs 17:3 *The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, But the LORD tests the hearts. (NKJV)*

When you put metal in a furnace and get it hot, it helps you refine it and take the garbage out of it and make it pure. That's exactly what God does with us. That analogy is used throughout the Bible. He puts us through the furnace of adversity, to refine our character and test our hearts to see:

Are we going to obey Him even when it's painful, even when it's difficult and our life is on the line and we have to give up everything?

As Christ said, "If you're not willing to give up father, mother, brother, sister, or even your own life, you're not fit for My Kingdom." It doesn't say that just applies to the smallest portion of mankind, everybody else gets an easy pass. It doesn't say that. It applies to everyone. Turn to 1 Thessalonians 2 and we'll see the same thing there.

1 Thessalonians 2:4 *But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. (NKJV)*

Notice again, He doesn't just want to develop His character in us, He wants to test us to see if we are going to endure to the end. It's he who endures to the end who is saved and receives salvation. That's why this Christian life is such a struggle and why it's so hard. We have to be willing to obey, even when it's painful. We have to be willing to give up everything else and stick with Him, even if it requires our own life from us. That's why before you get baptized, you go through the whole Luke 14 discussion, to count the cost and make sure you can stick to this because it's going to hurt and be hard. I remember when the minister who counseled me for baptism went over that and he said, "I know for you right now it's just going to be words because it was for me too. But I want you to remember it." He went through it in graphic detail and said there is going to be a time not long after you're baptized when you'll be thinking, I didn't know it was going to be this hard. Throughout your Christian life, you're going to get put in hard, difficult circumstances and will be struggling with it and I want you to remember this conversation. You knew up front, you had informed consent and you knew that this was going to be painful, it was going to be a struggle and you have to be willing to give your life. He said, I want you to understand that, because later you're going to remember this conversation and I can't tell you how many times I've been very grateful, when I've been in very painful trials and thought, "I don't like this." It flashes back into my mind—I'm sitting in the library in Big Sandy at that table and I was warned. He told me up front it was going to be like this, it's what I signed up for. It's simply how it works and we have to be willing to do that. The Bible directly tells us, it's only after we've been proved through the furnace of adversity that we receive salvation and that applies to everyone. The Bible doesn't allow for an exception for the majority of mankind. Turn to James 1:12.

James 1:12 *Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.* (NKJV)

Let me give you the definition of the Greek word that in the New King James is *proved* in English. The Greek word is transliterated into English as *dokimos* and is [Strong's #1384](#) and the definition I'm going to give you is from [The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament](#) by Spiros Zodhiates. It means:

"Proved, receivable, tried as metals by fire and thus be purified. Hence to be approved as acceptable men in the furnace of adversity".

In other words, when do we receive the crown of life? When we've been proven through the furnace of adversity. When we've proven that even when it's painful and difficult, when we're asked to give everything up, we love God more than anything else. We're willing to give up everything else in our lives if He requires it of us. We have to be Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego. When they're standing there and see this burning furnace and told "If you don't bow down to this, we're going to throw you in there." They look at him and say:

Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this manner. The God we serve is able to save us from this, but even if He doesn't—just for the record—we're still not bowing down to it. If we lose our lives to it, so be it. We put our God more important to us than our own lives.

We all have to be willing to do that. That's the contract we signed. Just read through Christ's parables. He who puts his hand to the plow and looking back, is not fit for my Kingdom. If you're not willing to give up father, mother, brother, sister, even your own life, you're not fit for My Kingdom. It's again and again—it's consistent throughout the entire New Testament.

That's why it's important when I say, framing the picture of prophecy, when we develop a scenario, take that foundational doctrine—an absolute mountain of scriptures to back up—it's straightforward, it's not murky, it's not something in symbolic language and you have to try and figure out what it's saying. It's just dogmatically clean with a mountain of scriptures to back it up and frame the picture with that and realize that everything else has to fit inside that frame. Once you do that, you realize you have to have a scenario that matches the foundation of the New Testament. We can't just look at this and say it can't mean what the Bible says because that's not emotionally satisfying. God is about love and feel good—as one person put it to me, God's way is positive. In other words, it feels good. No, read the book of Job—that doesn't work. It's literally about enduring to the end to make it and that applies to everyone. If we just understand that, then we know how to understand what takes place during the 8th day. If we just read the criteria that Christ uses to judge the rest of mankind, it's painfully obvious. Turn to Matthew 25:31.

Matthew 25:31 *When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.*

32) All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. (NKJV)

This is after Christ's return and what does He have? All the nations before Him. He's judging the rest of mankind. This is not referring to the Firstfruits. The criteria and the concept certainly apply to the Firstfruits, we want to be the sheep and not the goats. The concept certainly applies to us but what is He addressing? He has all the nations before Him. He's judging all the people who had their chance at salvation during the 8th day period and this is the criteria He is going to judge them on. Pay attention to the criteria as we read through this. If the 8th day pictures a wonderful, physical utopia where there's no difficult problems, similar to what we know the millennium does—I covered that in detail earlier this week—these criteria don't make sense if that's the case.

33) And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

34) Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

35) *for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in;*
36) *I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.* (NKJV)

Notice these people are suffering health problems, through lack of basic resources, they are dealing with all of the same kind of problems we deal with in our world today, aren't they? This doesn't sound like the millennium, does it?

37) *Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink?*
38) *When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You?*
39) *Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?*
40) *And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'*
41) *Then He will also say to those on the left hand, Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:*
42) *for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink;*
43) *I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'*
44) *Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?'*
45) *Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'*
46) *And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'* (NKJV)

Once again what do we have? The resurrection to eternal life and the resurrection to condemnation and the lake of fire and they are mentioned together. It's just like a farmer does with a harvest. That's why that analogy is used. A few years ago, I started discovering that, how we had separated the 1st resurrection and our idea of that being in time order and then we took all the wicked going into the lake of fire and stuck them 1000 years later. I actually grew up in rural Alabama in a farming community. I wasn't really involved in that culture but I saw it going on around me all my life. When this suddenly dawned on me, I felt like an idiot. I thought, I've grown up as a child watching harvests and never once saw where they do the good crop today and then put off dealing with the waste for years. That's just not how a harvest takes place. You do them together in a similar timeframe.

Notice what is happening here. Earlier this week I went through all the details of the millennium. How wonderful a timeframe it is without Satan. One of the first places I started was in Isaiah 2—*the swords into plowshares, the spears into pruning hooks*, there's no war. We went through where all the people are healed in Isaiah 35; we went through the plentiful earth and the plowmen overcoming the reaper and all these resources. What do we see in Revelation when it talks about Satan being released? We

get a war. That war is described in greater detail in Ezekiel but then you read through these criteria and what do we have? We experience a war, we have people who are sick, that are doing without clothing and food—all the basic things and problems you see in our world today. Why is that? Because the bad guy is back out again. Satan is released to deceive the nations again. Why? If we are focused on this idea that it always has to be emotionally satisfying—a loving God wouldn't do that—why does He leave him out today? Think about it—the way I like to humorously put it is, God is not like Gomer Pile. Some of you may not recognize that reference but years ago, I want to say in the 1960's there was a television program called Gomer Pile. I was too young to see it when it was being aired but I saw it as reruns growing up.

The whole story is about this guy who grew up in a rural town, everybody knew everybody and everybody was friendly. He's this wonderful, nice guy but really gullible. He has a hard time dealing with other people because he thinks everyone is as pure and nice hearted as he is. People often think of Satan's rebellion initially, even before mankind was created and they treat it like God is Gomer Pile. In other words, He created all these angels, gave them free moral agency, He gave them the choice between righteousness and rebellion but was just too naive to consider that if He gave them two options, He was going to have a group that chose the wrong option. He created free moral agency and just didn't understand how it worked. He is not Gomer Pile. He knew when He created millions of angels that He was going to have a group that was going to rebel. If He wanted everything to be comfortable and a warm, fuzzy experience for everybody, He could have tossed them in the lake of fire before making mankind. He made all these angels He knew He was going to have an attrition rate and He had a plan to deal with the rebels. All He had to do was create them all, give them free moral agency and wait. Sit back and wait for it to play out. Then He had his group of rebels and He already knew how He was going to use the rebels. They were going to be those who tempt and try and purify His human beings and have them make choices. That's why we deal with him today. It's not a "backup" plan situation. This was what was planned from the very beginning and that's why He lets him out again after the millennium, to serve the exact same purpose he does today.

The point I want you to get out of this sermon is, there is only one path to salvation, the one described in the New Testament. Try to find that easy slide path defined in the New Testament, find the scriptures that somehow make an exception to all of these clear scriptures or define how people's character is going to be developed and purified—you're going to be searching the rest of your life. I can tell you; I've had people challenge me for 12 years and not one person has come with the Bible and said here are the scriptures. They just tell me, an emotional, feel-good conclusion is what has to be true because God is love and that's all they can do. That's all you can base it on.

As we look forward to this day being fulfilled, realize it is very much about the good news that all the rest of mankind who were not given their chance at salvation as a Firstfruit, they are not lost, they are going to be brought up during the millennial period and that is where God is going to start working with them initially, build a foundation through this wonderful utopia and then turn the bad guy on them and see how well they

perform. That's how this process plays out. This day is not about a physical resurrection or an easy slide into the Kingdom of God. It's about the time of testing and judgment for the rest of mankind. The good news is, everyone else who doesn't understand the truth today, they get their chance, they get the opportunity to have the chance of going into the Kingdom of God, but the standards are the same. There's only one path to salvation, it's the one described in the New Testament. Let's understand as we look forward to this day, it's a wonderful thing to look forward to in the future, but everyone else in mankind is going to face the same struggles, they have to endure to the end and face the same standard as we do.