

A Famine of Hearing the Words of the LORD

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If you're like myself, over the years in the church of God, you've probably heard talk about the "*famine of the word*". If you've been around since the days in Worldwide, you've probably seen how they would lay out prophetic time line charts and get all the details laid out in a time line how they saw end time events playing out. Oftentimes one of the items listed on that chart would be a section they would label the famine of the word. The reason being they would interpret the scripture that we are going to look at today that does mention that God would bring a famine of the word upon the world but that was interpreted as a famine of the preaching of God's word. The assumption was that due to persecution by the beast and other factors in the world, that there would be a point in time where it would be impossible for anyone to be preaching God's word and proclaiming the gospel. They would put it in a section of the time line of there being a point in time where God's Word just wouldn't be preached.

What we're going to notice today, as we take a closer look at this particular scripture, is it doesn't actually say that there is a famine of *the preaching* of God's word. It says there is a famine of *the hearing* of God's word. That can have a totally different meaning than what we assume and there can be other spiritual lessons that can be contained within that. What we're going to do is take a closer look at this particular scripture and see that maybe we've made some incorrect assumptions in how we have interpreted this scripture and missed some important spiritual lessons that we can learn from it. If you would like a title for this sermon it's:

A Famine of the Hearing of the Words of the LORD

To start off with, let's turn to Amos 8, where this famous quote comes from—a famine of the word. We're going to start in verse 9 because it's important that we put this in context and notice the verses around this particular reference and the time frame it seems to placing it in. That's going to be important in looking at whether or not we have interpreted this verse correctly.

Amos 8:9 *"And it shall come to pass in that day," says the Lord GOD, "That I will make the sun go down at noon, And I will darken the earth in broad daylight; 10) I will turn your feasts into mourning, And all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist, And baldness on every head; I will make it like mourning for an only son, And its end like a bitter day. (NKJV)*

Verse 11 is the next one we're going to focus on, but notice in verse 9 and 10, it started off with a reference of *in that day*. This is not always the case 100% of the time, but oftentimes when you see that phrase, particularly when it's in prophetically focused scriptures, it's an indication that we're talking about an end time, time frame. You also see the references like in verse 9, I will make the sun go down at noon, I will darken the

earth in broad daylight. Certainly, seems to be indicating a Day of the LORD timeframe. Sometimes we can make incorrect assumptions and that is certainly what it appears to be indicating here. Keep that in mind, because we're going to look at this later and at what the Bible tells us about the preaching of God's Word in that timeframe. It is going to help us in understanding how we are to interpret verse 11.

Notice in verse 11, because this is our key scripture.

11) "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord GOD, "That I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine of bread, Nor a thirst for water, But of hearing the words of the LORD. (NKJV)

Notice in particular, as I mentioned earlier, it does not say a famine of the *preaching* of the God's word. It says *a famine of the hearing of God's Word*. We can logically make an assumption, which we will look at—whether it's correct or not. You could logically interpret that and say:

"If they aren't hearing it, maybe that is because nobody is preaching it and that's why no one hears it."

That's a possible interpretation but we are going to see there are other ways to look at this as well. Let's continue reading on to get the full context.

*12) They shall wander from sea to sea, And from north to east; They shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, But shall not find it.
13) In that day the fair virgins And strong young men Shall faint from thirst.
14) Those who swear by the sin of Samaria, Who say, 'As your god lives, O Dan!' And, 'As the way of Beersheba lives!' They shall fall and never rise again."*
(NKJV)

As I mentioned, the verses around verse 11 seem to be indicating a Day of the LORD timeframe. That's going to become important when we look at other scriptures that talk about the events that are happening around that timeframe. Notice in verse 11, it didn't say that there was a famine of the preaching of God's word. It didn't say it was totally absent and no one is preaching God's word—it says there is *a famine of the hearing of God's word*. To understand this a little better, let's look at the Hebrew word that is translated *hearing* in this verse. It's transliterated into English as *sama* and is [Strong's #8085](#) and the definition I'm about to give you is from [The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the Old Testament](#) by Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter and they define it as,

A verb meaning to hear, to obey, to listen, to be heard of, to be regarded, to cause to hear, to proclaim, to sound aloud.

The verb basically means "to hear" and in context expresses various connotations of this. The most famous use of this word is to introduce the Shema "Hear O Israel"

followed by the content of what the Israelites are to understand about the LORD their God and how they are to respond to Him (Deuteronomy 6:4). In a parallel usage the heavens are commanded to “Hear O heavens...” to the prophets’ message about Israel (Isaiah 1:2).

Notice when it’s referring to the *hearing*, it’s not just the issue of you hear a sound. You knock on a door or something and hear a sound and whether or not you are hearing it. The word gets into the concept of not just *hearing* but also *listening, paying attention, heeding* the message that is being communicated. That’s part of what this word translated as *hearing* is getting at. When you’re talking about a *famine of the hearing of God’s word*, it doesn’t automatically equate with “no one is preaching it”. It can also mean “not paying attention”. Not understanding it or heeding what is being said and responding accordingly. Notice it references the fact that this same word as in what is referred to as the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4. It says, “Hear O Israel” and what follows up with that are instructions of what they should hear and how they should obey God. It’s not just the issue of whether or not you are hearing a sound, it’s how do you respond to hearing that message. Is the message being communicated?

So, we need to consider that when it refers to a famine of the *hearing of God’s word*, it doesn’t automatically equate with no one is preaching it, it could be that no one is paying attention. No one is being receptive and positively responding to those words and is what we are getting at here. That’s what we need to consider.

Notice I pointed out as we looked at the context around verse 11, that it seemed to indicate a Day of the LORD end time, timeframe. So, let’s ask the question, what are other scriptures in the Bible that address what’s happening around that timeframe—do they indicate that there’s a total absence of the preaching of God’s word or do they graphically tells us the exact opposite? Do they tell us just exactly how God’s word is being preached and how it gets everyone’s attention? Turn to Revelation 11 and notice what this book tells us about the preaching of God’s word at the end time. What it actually does, is give us graphic details of exactly how it’s preached and how it gets the whole world’s attention. The issue is, no one likes the message and no one is being receptive to it. The verses we are going to talk about are addressing the two witnesses who will be proclaiming God’s word at the end time.

Revelation 11:3 *And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.”*
4) *These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth.*
5) *And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner.*
6) *These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire. (NKJV)*

If you have a couple of guys who are preaching God's word and performing these kinds of miracles, it's hard to just dismiss them as crackpots. There a lot of people who can come around today and proclaim themselves preachers of God and stand there and preach on street corners or get on television and try to get out their message. But we would say that's just some crazy guy proclaiming his ideas. But if you are calling fire from heaven, stopping the rain and creating these miracles, people take notice. Maybe there's something real with these guys. Let's read the rest of the events that Revelation tells us will happen with these two individuals and take note of the fact that the world is very aware of their message. They don't like what these guys have to say but it's not like they have never heard of them or know what they are proclaiming or never heard their message. They've heard it, they just don't like it.

7) When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them.

8) And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

9) Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves.

10) And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. (NKJV)

Notice that reaction. People are celebrating the death of these guys. These are not two obscure individuals who they aren't familiar with or have never heard what these guys had to say—they are quite familiar with these two and what they've had to say. They are just not fans of what they had to say. They are quite upset with them. But it's not like they've never heard of them or not familiar with what they had to say. Just to finish the thought, continue on in verse 11.

11) Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. (NKJV)

Imagine the attention that this is going to bring about. Everyone is celebrating—these two guys are finally dead—and then they are resurrected back to life and ascend to heaven. That's going to get the attention of the entire world of all those who are still around at this point. Obviously, you're towards the end of the Day of the LORD at this point and a lot of mankind have been wiped out and killed. What I want you to take note of is, these guys have been preaching in the timeframe leading up to the Day of the LORD and throughout that timeframe. It's not like the world isn't familiar with what they have to say. If, when they are killed everybody is having a party and celebrating and are glad they are gone, then people are familiar with what they had to say. They know who these guys are, they are familiar with what they are saying, they are just not receptive to it. They are not fans of it, they hate what they have to say. But it's not like they have never heard of them.

This should shed some light on what we see in Revelation 6. We see a description of the heavenly signs that take place, just right before and at the beginning of the Day of the LORD and all the horrific events that take place. Notice the reaction described when a lot of mankind start seeing these events happening. We can put two and two together and realize that these people are familiar with the message of the two witnesses based upon the response they have. Start in Revelation 6:12.

Revelation 6:12 *I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood.*

13) And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind.

14) Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place.

15) And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains,

16) and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!"

17) For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (NKJV)

Notice they are not having a confused reaction going, "What is this? What could possibly be happening?" or being totally confused—"We don't know what is taking place." No, their reaction is, this is *the wrath of God* happening. How do they know that? How are they putting that together? Because the two witnesses have been preaching up to that point, getting everyone's attention. These guys can call down fire from heaven, they can stop the rain, they can bring about miracles and people are taking them seriously. They are familiar with what these guys have had to say. So, when the events that these guys have been telling them are going to happen, and actually happen, people put two and two together and they know what's taking place. It isn't an issue that there's been this famine and no preaching of God's word and they've never heard it, are not familiar with it. No, they have an idea of what's going on, they're just not happy about it. Let's notice the reaction of how people respond. Realize through all this, these guys have been able to pull out these miracles. They've been proclaiming what's going to take place, and then the events that they've been saying are going to happen, start happening. Anyone with two brain cells to rub together at that point say,

"Wait, it sounds like these guys are for real. They told us this stuff was going to happen and now it's happening. Maybe we should take them seriously. They're not just crackpots—how did they pull this one off?"

You start taking people seriously at that point when they make these predictions. You might have ignored them before, but then when they say what's going to happen and that stuff actually happens, you say:

"Wait a minute, maybe I should consider what they have to say."

Let's notice now, even as these dramatic events start playing out what these two men have been proclaiming and it actually comes true. There is graphic evidence that everyone can see that they are not just "nuts", there is something to this. Notice the Bible tells us how there is repeated rejection of everything. The message is, *repent and turn to God and stop sinning*. That's always the bottom line of what God sends prophets to do. They foretell the events but it's always—included in that message—you need to stop sinning and obey God. That's always the underlying point. Notice in Revelation 9, we're well into the Day of the LORD. We'll pick up in the later part of this sixth trumpet. By the time we get to the sixth trumpet, you've already had massive devastation upon the earth. Major plagues have rocked the entire earth and even this sixth trumpet itself proclaims about a third of mankind being killed in the course of an hour. After events like that and you have these two men who have been proclaiming all this, anyone with two brain cells to rub together start taking them seriously at this point. This is too uncanny that they've been able to foretell all this. They are claiming they are representatives of the true God and there is graphic evidence in all the world events that have been taking place that there is something to this claim. They aren't just "crazy nuts"—there is something to this. Let's notice how people respond.

Revelation 9:20 *But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk.*

21) *And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.* (NKJV)

The famine that is happening here, is a *hearing of God's word*. It is being preached to them they just don't want to hear it. They aren't receptive, they're not listening, they are not responding accordingly. They are constantly being told they need to repent and being given very, very graphic evidence. Undeniable that these two witnesses are telling them to repent and that this is the wrath of God. There's obviously something to their claims because they keep proclaiming these events and these events happen. You can't miss them. But how are they responding? They are still rejecting it. Even throughout the Day of the LORD, this is repeated trend, in spite of all the plagues that take place and as this is playing out, the two witnesses are going to keep telling people, you need to repent, you need to turn away from sin and worship the true God. We're going to see a repeated trend of them rejecting it again and again. Turn to Revelation 16, we're going to pick up during the seven last bowl plagues. This is the fourth bowl plague.

Revelation 16:8 *Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire.*

9) *And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.* (NKJV)

Notice again the issue that is taking place. It's not like they have not heard the message, it's not like no one is preaching it—they just don't want to hear it; they are not receptive to it.

Continuing in verse 10) ...

10) Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain.

11) They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds. (NKJV)

Notice again, the issue is not one of a total absence of God's word being preached. It's an absence of anyone being receptive to the message that is being preached, in spite of how severe events get here, there is just a total rebellion and rejection of being receptive to God's word. We need to understand, as I mentioned in the beginning of this sermon, we have incorrectly made the assumption throughout most of my life—I know from childhood I grew up hearing about a "famine of the word"—and the assumption was made that if there is a famine of the word, that means there is a famine of the preaching of the word. In other words, the reason people aren't hearing it, is that it's not being preached. I understand the logic that is connected, but as we see, it doesn't really match scripture. The Bible repeatedly refers to the issue of people not *having the ears to hear or the eyes to see*. It has nothing to do with being physically blind or physically deaf—just being incapable from a physical perspective of seeing or hearing. It's not because of an absence of someone there to proclaim or preach the message to them, it's the inability to be receptive and to respond accordingly. To notice this trend, turn to Deuteronomy 29 and we'll see that this goes all the way back to Moses dealing with Ancient Israel.

Deuteronomy 29:1 *These are the words of the covenant which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He made with them in Horeb.*

2) Now Moses called all Israel and said to them: "You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land— (NKJV)

He's telling them:

"You've witnessed this, you've seen this. This is not like you're not aware of this or no one has told you about it, you've witnessed it."

Continuing in verse 3) ...

3) the great trials which your eyes have seen, the signs, and those great wonders.

4) *Yet the LORD has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day. (NKJV)*

He's not saying he wasn't there, as God's servant, proclaiming all this to them—they didn't witness these events—he's saying:

"You saw it, you heard it, you're familiar with it, I've been telling you about it but you don't have the eyes to see or the ears to hear."

He's referring to a spiritual blindness. With Ancient Israel, as we know, this was a physical covenant relationship God had with them. Their eyes were not open to understand the truth and receive the Holy Spirit which is the key issue. The New Testament particularly talks about how the Holy Spirit gives us the eyes to see and ears to hear. This is the core issue we are getting at here. Being receptive spiritually to hearing the message.

Christ also speaks about this in Matthew 13 where the apostles ask Christ why is it that He preaches in parables? Why was he always doing this when He was speaking to the crowds and He explains it's because of this issue that some have been granted the eyes to see and the ears to hear and the majority of the world at that time had not. Even as of today, that's still true.

Matthew 13:10 *And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"*

11) He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

12) For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.

13) Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. (NKJV)

It's not the issue that Christ is not there proclaiming the message to them. He's there, they just can't hear it because it's an issue of spiritual blindness. This is what *the famine of the hearing of the word* is getting at. It's an issue of spiritual blindness, it's not the lack of someone proclaiming it.

14) And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive;

15) For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.'

16) But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear;

17) for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. (NKJV)

What Christ is getting at is the issue of being spiritually blind and deaf from lack of having their minds opened and having the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul makes similar comments if you turn to Acts 28, we'll see him mentioning this with his preaching. I'm hammering the same point but I just want you to notice that as he is saying this, it's not the absence of someone proclaiming the message. That's not what the core issue is, it's whether someone is receptive. The lack of hearing isn't because there's not someone there proclaiming it, it's a lack of being receptive to it.

Acts 28:17 *And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: "Men and brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans,*

18) who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death.

19) But when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation.

20) For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see you and speak with you, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain."

21) Then they said to him, "We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you.

22) But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere."

23) So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.

24) And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved.

25) So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers,

26) saying, Go to this people and say: "Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; And seeing you will see, and not perceive;

27) For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.' "

28) Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" (NKJV)

Not an issue of someone not speaking it, he's referring to those who are receptive to the message and those who were not.

29) *And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.*

30) *Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him,*

31) *preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him. (NKJV)*

It wasn't an issue that Paul isn't there preaching it. He's there preaching it, he's referring to those who are receptive and are hearing the message—not from lack of someone preaching it, but those who hear or don't hear in terms of whether they are receptive and respond accordingly. Whoever understands the message and is willing to repent and put it into action what they've been taught—that's the core issue here. We have to understand that is really what this is about. We're going to see as we go through this sermon, even those of us who receive the Holy Spirit, if we are neglectful and not being diligent in our spiritual lives, we can have a hearing problem as well. We can develop these same issues. Whether we actually hear God's word and have the eyes to see and the ears to hear depends upon our spiritual development. Turn to 1 John 4 and we'll see that if we're tuned into the world from a carnal, physical perspective, we'll hear the world and not God. If we are tuned into the Holy Spirit, then we're going to hear God's word and what He has to say.

1 John 4:4 *You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.*

5) *They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them.*

6) *We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (NKJV)*

If we've received the Holy Spirit and we are yielding to it in our day-to-day life, then we're going to hear God's message. But if we are neglecting that and going in the other direction, then we develop the "hearing problem" as well. In all of this that's one of the big lessons for us to learn. What I've focused on in the first part of this sermon is the prophecy of Amos in the world in general—that there would be a *famine of the hearing of God's word*, of being receptive and responding accordingly. Which is not a big surprise when the majority of the world is not being called at this time and is getting more and more evil as time goes on. Obviously turning more and more away from being receptive to God's word. What we in the church of God need to be aware of, is that the Bible tells us, in the end time the church of God is going to suffer from these problems as well. We are prophesied to have a hearing problem when it comes to hearing God's word. If we turn to Revelation 3 we'll see a prophecy that directly tells us as a warning, that this is something that is going to be extant in the church of God—a hearing problem. A hearing of God's word is going to be a significant problem in the church of God in the end time. It's something that we all need to pay attention to, to make sure we don't fall into this category ourselves. Revelation 3:14, we're going to read Christ's letter to the church of Laodicea.

Revelation 3:14 *And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:*

15) *“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.*

16) *So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. (NKJV)*

Other translations will put this in English as, *I’m about to vomit you out of my mouth.* It’s a very graphic image but think about this. The body of Christ is the church. If Christ is about to eject it out of His body, that’s spiritual death. He’s warning that you are on the verge of losing your eternal life. Notice the next couple of verses that back that up.

17) *Because you say, I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— (NKJV)*

Notice how scathing that evaluation is. You think you’re in great shape but you’re in horrible shape. That’s the reality of your condition.

18) *I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; 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.*

19) *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. (NKJV)*

Notice in particular verse 20.

20) *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.*

21) *To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.*

22) *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” ’ ’ ” (NKJV)*

We started off this sermon talking about a *famine of hearing God’s word.* We talked about the fact that those who have received the Holy Spirit have had their minds opened, and have *the eyes to see and the ears to hear.* Notice the picture that Christ is painting of the end time church. Those of us who have been called as Firstfruits are supposed to have the Father and Christ living in us through the Holy Spirit. What’s the picture that He is painting here? Christ is on the outside of the house, knocking to get in. That’s a scary picture, if He’s picturing our lives as Him on the outside, trying to knock to get in. He’s saying I’m knocking and if anyone hears me—the very statement assumes that I’m expecting a good number of them will not hear Me. That’s a scary picture of what we’re talking about. Realize we are talking about the audience that is supposed to have *the ears to hear and the eyes to see.* As Christ told us in the gospel, His sheep—

the church of God, the audience He's addressing—these are the individuals who are supposed to hear His voice. If He's on the outside knocking and saying, if anyone hears Me, I'll work with them—"Houston, we have a problem." Turn to John 10, Christ tells us that His sheep—those who have been called to be Firstfruits, who have received His Spirit—are supposed to be those that hear His voice.

John 10:22 *Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter.*
23) *And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch.*
24) *Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, "How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly."*
25) *Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me.*
26) *But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you.*
27) *My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.*
28) *And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.*
29) *My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand.*
30) *I and My Father are one."* (NKJV)

How does this happen? We notice here, in Revelation 3, He's saying to the church who He is addressing, who are obviously Firstfruit Christians that He is writing this letter to and He's saying: "I'm knocking on the door—I'm on the outside." which is a scary picture by itself—"If anyone hears Me, I'll come and work with them." This is an audience who are supposed to be His sheep and hear His voice, how did they get in a state where He is questioning whether they are even going to hear Him. We're going to look at that because the Bible tells us that if we are neglectful in our spiritual lives, one of the things that will happen to us is we become dull of hearing. We develop a hearing problem. We aren't talking about physical deafness; we are talking about spiritual deafness. If we allow that to happen, we become part of the crowd where there is a famine of hearing God's word. It's not like we don't have access to it, it's not like it's not being preached, we're just not hearing it. We have Christ on the outside knocking on the door, trying to get our attention to see if we are listening. Turn to Hebrews 5 and we'll see that if we are neglectful, how we can develop a hearing problem. It's going to directly tell us that if we are not diligently studying and digging into His word and constantly practicing it in our lives, striving to overcome, one of the results that happens is we become dull of hearing. If we allow that to happen for too long, what ultimately happens is spiritual death.

Hebrews 5:6 *As He also says in another place: "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek";*
7) *who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear,*
8) *though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.*

9) *And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,*
10) *called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek,"*
11) *of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. (NKJV)*

The audience He is referring to here is one which has become dull of hearing. In other words, you previously were better at hearing than you are now. This isn't like you've never been called before and you're just now having your mind opened and that problem is being resolved. He is saying you've *become* dull of hearing. Previously you could hear better and you're losing your ability to hear and becoming dull. How did this happen? Pick up in verse 12.

12) *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. (NKJV)*

These are people who ought to be teachers. These are people who have been called, who have received the Holy Spirit, who've been given the eyes to see, the ears to hear, the opportunity to understand the word. He's saying that if you had been diligently doing your job, you should be experts and should teachers by now. But you still need milk because you've been very neglectful is what He is saying.

13) *For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. (NKJV)*

Let me share with you the Greek word that is translated as *unskilled*. The Greek word that is translated as *unskilled* is transliterated into English as *apeiros* and is Strong's #552. The definition I'm going to give you is from The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament by Spiros Zodhiates.

Without experience, inexperienced, unskillful, ignorant of true doctrine.

The reason they are ignorant of true doctrine is they have been neglectful in study. They've been neglectful in keeping their face in the Bible and studying God's word and becoming familiar with it. They've been coasting along and as a result they are losing their connection with it and becoming *dull of hearing*.

14) *But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (NKJV)*

Let me share with you the Greek word that's translated into English as the word *use* in this verse. It's transliterated into English as *hexis*, Strong's #1838 and this definition is also going to come from Zodhiates:

To have; habit; usually of life or body, therefore practice or exercise.

Notice what we're getting at here. The two main concepts we are seeing in verse 13 and 14, are:

- One, being diligent in our study to constantly grow in grace and knowledge of God's word
- and
- Two, putting it into practice.

In other words, making it something we are actively practicing in our day to day lives. If we are not doing those two things, what happens? We become *dull of hearing*. We become a part of the crowd that God's word is being preached to, but we're not hearing it, we're not grasping it, we're not growing in it. Ultimately what that leads to is spiritual death—if we allow that to continue. We need to keep reading in chapter 6 because notice— (we assume Paul wrote the book of Hebrews; the book doesn't tell us that it was Paul, that's an assumption.) —whoever is the author of Hebrews, what they are stating is how you come to need milk and not solid food. You are just skimming along with the basics. Notice in chapter 6 it's addressing that very thing.

Hebrews 6:1 *Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ [the milk], let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,*
2) of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.
3) And this we will do if God permits.
4) For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit,
5) and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,
6) if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.
7) For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God;
8) but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned. (NKJV)

It talks about, if we're not going beyond the basics and really becoming familiar with God's word and continuing to grow, you eventually lose the Holy Spirit. He's referring to spiritual death; that's what it's warning us of. How do we address this problem? We can see as we read in Revelation 3, it's prophesied for the church of God at the end time to have this problem. To be in a state where Christ is on the outside, knocking on the door, trying to get people's attention, hoping that someone is going to wake up and pay attention, hear Him and invite Him back in because He got kicked out. That's a scary picture. What's the solution to this? Turn back to Revelation 3, Christ gives us a formula for solving this problem. We're going to jump into the middle of the context because we already read the full letter to Laodicea, but verse 18 and 19 is what we're going to focus on.

Revelation 3:18 *I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; 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.*

19) As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. (NKJV)

Verse 18 actually gives us a three-step plan and formula for how to bring about this repentance. Christ is saying you need to be zealous and repent and clean up your act. You guys are in bad, bad shape. Earlier in this letter He says you are naked, miserable, poor and blind—in horrible shape. He actually gave a formula for what needs to take place to turn this around. He expressed it in symbolic language. If we let the Bible interpret itself, we can see what He's getting at. Notice in verse 18, the first step He says is, *I counsel you to buy from Me, gold refined in the fire*. What does He mean *gold refined in the fire*? Turn to 1 Peter 1 and let the Bible itself interpret this and we'll see what He is referring to here.

1 Peter 1:6 *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,*

7) that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

8) whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,

9) receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls. (NKJV)

He refers to “faith” as *gold refined in the fire*. That's our first step. As Hebrews 11 tells us, it's impossible to please God, it's impossible to have a productive, positive relationship with Him without having faith in Him. That's the bedrock it's all based upon. The first thing we need is solid faith in God. Turn to Hebrews 11:6.

Hebrews 11:6 *But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

7) By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

8) By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

9) By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise;

10) for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. (NKJV)

Notice that this faith and trust in God is a trust that God knows best, that He always knows the right thing, He's going to work it out, even if it's painful and difficult for us. Notice how faith is always connected with action. We're going to see a trend of that. Because of the faith, Abraham is willing to go but he doesn't know where he's going. God says, pack up your stuff, leave everything that is familiar, go that way and I'll tell you when to stop and Abraham is willing to do it. Noah builds an ark. God says build this huge boat and I'm going to send all these animals here; I'm going to flood the earth. He had to be ridiculed and made fun of by all the neighbors—

“That nut down the street building that big boat, like there's going to be water to float that thing in.”

He had to be ridiculed and harassed for doing that but he was willing to put up with all of it because he's willing to face this to follow God. He's willing to follow God when it's painful. He's willing to follow God when it's difficult. That's how our faith is shown. Turn to the latter part of the chapter, Hebrews 11:35. A lot of the rest of this chapter deals with the stories we love to focus on. People who got into difficult situations but God stepped in and He took care of everything for them. They were saved from pain and they escaped the disaster they were about to face. But we also need to realize the latter part of the chapter where people gave their lives, where they were tortured and got killed. Where things from a physical perspective didn't end so well. They had to have faith in God and trust that He's going to work it out. He's going to work it out to their best advantage.

Hebrews 11:35 *Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.*

36) Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.

37) They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—

38) of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

39) And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise,

40) God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. (NKJV)

Notice that they are willing to face pain, they are willing to do things that are difficult. Over the last few years, I learned some things that were shocking to me. It was when we first came to understand that God the Father was actually the God of the Old Testament. Our concept that we had had for years of Christ being the God of the Old Testament with God the Father never interacting with anybody was incorrect. I knew several individuals, who, when this first came out and we discussed it, directly told me that this was obviously true. They went through it and we discussed in detail as we went through all the scriptures and they said; “Yes this is obviously correct.” But once it

became painful, once they realized it was going to be controversial and they would lose friends and be ostracized by sticking to what they had previously admitted was correct, suddenly they changed their minds. They weren't willing to stick with that if it's going to be painful. Now they changed their minds when it became difficult. That's not how faith works. Once we acknowledge something is correct, we have to be willing to follow through on it, even if it's painful. Even if we lose friends, even if it's controversial, if we can prove it's correct and is what's right, then we have to act accordingly. That's a test of our spiritual strength. Notice in James 2—it directly tells us the very definition of faith. It's evidenced by whether we are willing to act on it, show it in how we behave, even if that's painful.

James 2:14 *What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?*

15) *If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,*

16) *and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?*

17) *Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

18) *But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*

19) *You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! (NKJV)*

The demons intellectually recognize that this is true. They just don't act accordingly. They aren't willing to take that information and then change their behavior and obey. They acknowledge He's the true God, they just aren't willing to follow.

20) *But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?*

21) *Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?*

22) *Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?*

23) *And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God.*

24) *You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.*

25) *Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?*

26) *For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. (NKJV)*

We have to have the faith that stirs us to action. To be willing to follow God and obey Him, even when it's painful, even when it's inconvenient, even if we could lose our friends, our job, our lives—whatever that could mean—we have to put God above everything else. If we expect that it's always going to feel good and be comfortable, we signed up for the wrong program. This is about being willing to feel pain and willing to do whatever God asks us to do, even if that's difficult and painful.

This leads us directly to the next step in Christ's formula. Turn to Revelation 3 so we can see the next thing He mentions. This ties in directly to what we just discussed.

Revelation 3:18 *I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; (NKJV)*

We've already seen that God refined *in the fire* is a reference to faith. Let's notice the next thing.

18 continued) ... and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; (NKJV)

What is He referring to as *white garments*? If we turn to Revelation 19, we can see what this is referring to. We'll see these fit exactly how we saw faith defined.

Revelation 19:6 *And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!*

7) Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."

8) And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. (NKJV)

He's referring to gold refined in the fire as *faith* and these *white garments* are *righteous acts*. True faith—what does it do—it leads us to righteous acts, to behave accordingly, be receptive to God's message and then behave and carry out in our lives whatever He is telling us to do. Whatever He asks us to give up, whatever He asks us to pursue, we are willing to do that. We act upon that faith. That has a natural result as we're going to see and solves our seeing and hearing problems. Turn to Revelation 3 and let's notice the final step.

Revelation 3:18 *... and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. (NKJV)*

This is the third step in the process. If you notice, Christ's evaluation of the Laodicean church is that *you're blind—you're naked, you're blind, I'm knocking on the door and you're not hearing Me. So, the eyes to see, the ears to hear* are both compromised. That's because they are quenching the Holy Spirit—they are pushing it away. If we have the gold refined in the fire—we have faith and are truly believing in God. We are acting on that faith—the white garments—to have *righteous acts*. There is a natural result that follows. Turn to 2 Peter 1 and we'll see this described.

2 Peter 1:5 *But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge,*

6) *to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness,*

7) *to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.*

8) *For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

9) *For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. (NKJV)*

If we are practicing this, we are yielding to the Holy Spirit which is basically what we're getting at here. If we have the faith in God to act upon that faith and show it in our actions with righteous acts, what happens is you're being receptive to the Holy Spirit. Then God gives you more of His Spirit, which gives you more understanding. It strengthens that ability to have *the eyes to see and ears to hear*. It's basically a cycle of continuing to grow and learn more and show that in our lives and in our actions. As more of our sins are revealed to us, we repent more, we change, we overcome. God tests us and hopefully as we're growing, going forward in our spiritual lives, we get stronger in yielding to the Spirit and that makes our vision and hearing, from a spiritual point of view, stronger. The reverse is also true. If we are neglectful of that, if we are not studying His word, if we're not diligently trying to overcome and just trying to coast along on milk, what happens? We're slowly losing as we become unskilled in His word and develop a hearing and seeing problem. We get further and further away. What ultimately happens then is spiritual death if you keep going down that path.

What we need to be doing is making sure we are diligently studying His word. That we are doing our best to become experts in what the word of God says. More importantly that we are living it and practicing it in our day to day lives. As we're continuing to yield to that, then we will grow in grace and knowledge and then we'll grow in the fruits of the Spirit.

As I've mentioned throughout this sermon, the end time is prophesied to be a time when there is a famine of the hearing of God's word. It's not a famine of the preaching of God's word. It's not telling us that we are going to have a time when God's word simply won't be preached. The Bible graphically tells us, it's absolutely going to be preached and will get the whole world's attention at the end time. However, the world in general won't be receptive to listening and unfortunately many in the church of God are likely to fall into that condition as well. For us, it won't be because we weren't called, it will be because of neglect. As we go forward from this Sabbath, let's make sure we are doing our due diligence to keep our faces in the Bible, to be regularly studying God's word and growing in grace and knowledge and most importantly—yielding to the Spirit, correcting ourselves when we see we fall short and continue to grow and practice it in our day to day lives.