

A Place Of Safety? (Part 5)

Summary

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Given 29-Aug-92; Sermon #036

Perhaps you have heard of the author Malachi Martin, in the last couple of months. Every time he authors a book my wife and I try to read it. Malachi Martin is an American; he was a Jesuit priest for over 25 years, reached a fairly high position, and spent most of those 25 years in the Vatican as a professor at the Vatican Pontifical Biblical Institute.

He has written the following books in last 15 or 20 years: "The Jesuits," "The Vatican" and "The Final Conclave." Probably "The Final Conclave" was the most well known of the ones that he did. But his latest is entitled "Keys of This Blood." It's a weighty tome of over 700 pages and in each one of his books he gives insight into the Catholic church that are generally not available to the public. In "Keys of This Blood" he gives Pope John Paul's geopolitical outlook.

That outlook incidentally is based on the visions of Fatima and also Pope John Paul's mystical beliefs regarding the virgin Mary. But tumultuous things are occurring within the Catholic church because of John Paul's outlook.

It is Malachi Martin's belief that unless something is done by the Pope, that we are witnessing the death of the Catholic church which he feels is in the process of breaking up into smaller national churches. In other words there will be an American Catholic Church. There might be a French Catholic Church, or a German Catholic Church, but none of them owing any allegiance to the Pope in Rome. He lays the problem in a number of different areas—a great deal of the blame is laid on Pope John Paul because of his outlook, because of the way that he is conducting himself in his office.

I want to give you a couple of quotes from his book and I am doing this because I want us to see the parallels to what is occurring in the true church these last couple of years. You might recall the sermons I gave on Laodiceanism. The premise of those three sermons was that, *"If it is happening in the world, it is happening in the church."*

The world around us—our environment especially here in the United States and Canada—is Laodicean in its approach to life. Laodiceanism has come into the church and the result has been that now the church—the true church—is becoming thoroughly Laodicean, and is actually on a drive to becoming more and more like the world. It is moving toward orthodox Protestantism at a frightening rate and what is so interesting to us is that Malachi Martin has been showing, or is showing in this book, that the same

things have been happening inside the Catholic church.

Except that he puts his finger on it beginning sometime in the early 1960s, when there was quite a drive in this direction. Those of you who are older in the faith (or maybe just older) might remember the words, "*the ecumenical movement*." Well that was a movement in the world council of churches—including the Catholic church—were getting together and were blending their ideas regarding theologies to see how close they could come to one another. Well, Malachi Martin's records that this is one of those factors that is in the process of destroying the Catholic Church.

I'm going to read first from page 656.

John Paul's second reason—the more cogent one for him—is drawn from the Fatima message.

You might recall the miracle of Fatima that occurred in 1917. I believe it was October 13, 1917. It was quite an occurrence. From those series of messages, or that series of visions, that three young children were given, came messages to the Catholic church. The last of which was to be opened in 1960 and indeed it was. But as this book reports, the Popes that were affected by it—who read it—refused to have anything to do with it. Okay that is what he is talking about here.

That message predicts that a catastrophic change will shortly shatter any plans or designs that men may have established. This is the era of Fatima...

In other words he is saying that there is an either/or situation. Either the church—that is the Catholic church which Malachi Martin feels to be the true church—obeys that message or else. The "or else" is that there will be catastrophe's beyond the belief of mankind that will occur.

Men had abandoned religion. God does not intend to let human affairs go on for a long time in that fashion because this is His world—He created it for His glory, He made it possible for all men to attain the Heaven of His glory by sending his only son, Jesus Christ, to expiate the punishment due men for his sins. This is why John Paul is waiting [Waiting for what?] because he believes God must first intervene before John Paul's majority or major ministry to all men can start.

Listen carefully to that, and I want you to think about what is happening within the true church (the Church of God) today. John Paul believes that he has a major ministry to perform to this world.

In Papa Wojtyla's outlook, therefore, the Grand Design of which he is the nominated Servant is the design of divine providence to recall men to the values that derive only from belief from religion and from divine revelation. His is an unpleasant message and, for the moment, a thankless job. He has to warn his contemporaries of his conviction that human catastrophe on a world scale—according to his information [you see the message of Fatima]—is impending.

He has to admit that he, like everybody else, is in the dark as to when it will occur, although he does know some of the horrific details of that worldwide catastrophe. He knows also that it will not come without prior warning, but that only those already renewed in heart—and that would probably be a minority—will recognize it for what it is and make preparations for the tribulations that will follow.

John Paul feels that it is his responsibility to warn the world. He is fully set to do it; he is only waiting for the sign for him to begin that responsibility. I want you to compare that with what is occurring within the true church where the man who is now the head of the largest congregation of the true church has stated in my own hearing—I heard it with my own ears!—that he feels no responsibility to warn the world. He feels no responsibility to take the Ezekiel message to the people of Israel. An interesting comparison.

It is so interesting that the false prophet, the antichrist is gearing up spiritually, physically and mentally to be prepared to do his responsibility to the world, while at the same time the true church is **falling away** from its responsibility to warn the world of what is occurring.

On page 675, Malachi Martin is talking—expounding upon what he calls the "Judas principal." He is talking about the betrayal of what he feels is the "true church" by those who are in the highest positions within the "true church." And so he feels this "Judas principal" or the "Judas complex" is at work within the "true church" (the Catholic church) and is tearing it into pieces.

Paul used that phrase 'the mystery of iniquity' [he's talking about II Thessalonians 2] when writing to the Thessalonians about the universal

apostasy that will precede the appearance of the anti-Christ in the last days before the end of all human time. Before those terrible events at the final end, Paul tells his faithful, they will be faced with the fact that, contrary to human expectation, iniquity—the specific attack of Lucifer on the followers of Jesus—will operate on a grand scale. Jesus himself, speaking of those last days, echoed the same note, warning his followers that the servants of iniquity would do to them exactly as they would do to Him, so that even the just would succumb if God did not shorten those days of their sufferings. Jesus' Church would be treated as Jesus had been treated by His enemies. It is not fanciful but frighteningly impressive to realize that the Judas complex in Churchmen [he's talking about the ministry] has already led the Church into a condition that reproduces the sufferings imposed on Jesus through the treachery of Judas.

What have the churchmen produced in the church? Think of this in relation to the true church as I tell you what Malachi Marten said the effect of this has been in the false church.

The agony of doubt and fear Jesus underwent in Gethsemane's Garden is paralleled by the Gethsemane of doubt and fear that dissident theologians have created in the Church.

You think the sheep aren't confused? You think they don't know what to do? You think they aren't milling around spiritually, morally, and ethically, if not physically and literally?

The neglect and contempt of Judas for partaking in what actually was a sacred event, the Last Supper [now he is zeroing in on a specific doctrine—what you and I call Passover] is reproduced in the multiple ways that the anti-Church [he means this movement of dissidence within the church—he calls this "the antichurch"] has effectively diminished the sacramental importance of the Eucharist [Passover]—indeed, the very reality of the Eucharist as the Body and Blood of Christ.

The imprisonment, torture, scourging and crucifixion of Jesus—direct results of Judas' treachery—have been and still are today reproduced in the bodies of millions who have been betrayed by Churchmen into the hands of cruel governments in Europe, in Asia, in Latin America and in Africa. More especially, the priests and prelates in those places have submitted to

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indescribable tortures precisely because they embody Christ's official Church and minister to His Mystical Body.

The desertion of Christ by the Apostles once Christ was arrested finds its mystical parallel in today's Churchmen. They deny they know Him as the Son of God, or even that they know or stand with Him...

What a condemnation of the ministry of that church. A little bit later he says,

That such an overall manifestation of the once latent power of that iniquity, now rampant within the Church and directly the doing of the anti-Church surely orients the mind to at least the beginnings, if not the actual beginning, of that universal apostasy among believers that St. Paul explicitly foretells and insists is the direct prelude to the climatic arrival of the Man of Destiny, the anti-Christ.

The overall deterioration of the Roman Catholic's institutional structure has now gone so far, indeed with each passing year proceeds at such a sustained pace; and Pope John Paul II and his papal bureaucracy have been pushed or have retreated into such ineffectual isolation from the day-to-day governance of the Church Universal, that now three dreadful outcomes are possible. Any of them could—probably would—entail the final disintegration of this Roman Catholic institutional organization as we have known it, and as men and women have known it for over five hundred years.

Well brethren, that is what is taking place from an insiders view—an insider who has a great deal of concern about what is going on inside of his church. The reason I read that was to reinforce what I told you in the last couple of weeks—that what we are looking at in II Thessalonians is not something that is isolated just to the true church, but is something that is universal in character and also envelopes the true church. It is taking place within the true church as well. The true church is being betrayed by its very ministry and it is throwing the sheep into such confusion they don't know what to do and they are falling back upon the thought, the hope, perhaps the fantasy that Christ will take care of it—He'll do something about it.

Yes indeed, He is going to do something about it, and He tells us in the book of Revelation what He is going to do about it. But as for now, that disintegration of the true church is going to continue I feel, and it is going to continue to the place where people

are going to be led into very compromising positions. I think, in light of the series of sermons that I have just given, that it is important to us that we summarize and draw conclusions here in that (I feel) are especially relevant to us in regard to this series on fleeing, the place of safety, the man of sin and the mystery of iniquity.

I want to do this because I don't want us to get the wrong focus, as the people to whom Paul wrote in II Thessalonians originally did. Let's begin by considering these facts and we're going to begin in Revelation 12:14-17.

Revelation 12:14-17 But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

We can now reach some conclusions regarding this. The first is of course that a part of the church is being taken to a place identified as "her place in the wilderness." This is clearly a place of safety for her and considering what it says in verse 17, part of the church is not in the same place but is being persecuted by the dragon because of religious convictions. So clearly there is a geographical separation that occurs in which one part of the church is in one area of the earth and the rest of the church is scattered throughout the rest of the earth. This segregation continues for a time, a times and a half of time and the fleeing is just as literal as the fleeing of the woman earlier in the chapter.

From every indication this "fleeing"—maybe that's the wrong word—the episode here at the end of Revelation 12 takes place at the same time Jerusalem is trodden down by the Gentiles for 42 months and the two witnesses (of Revelation 11) are doing their preaching for 1260 days. At the same time, the beast and the false prophet (of Revelation 13) are exercising their greatest authority for a period of 42 months and at the same time the tribulation (which is 2½ years) and the Day of the Lord (which is one year) is occurring. All of these events are of the same length of time and they are occurring simultaneously.

The bible also shows that there is going to be ample warning for those who are

watching. But we must be careful because all down through the life of the church, smaller types of end-time events will be occurring that could lead someone astray if they are not careful. That's what happened between I and II Thessalonians. Some of the Thessalonians re-interpreted Paul's use of the word "sudden" to "*immediate*." They were not careful and they got all excited and expected that Christ would return immediately.

Okay, conclusion #1 is: There **will** be a geographically separation of the church. We can positively, absolutely reach that conclusion. There will be a geographically separation of the church.

Another familiar scripture in Luke 21:36—where Jesus said:

Luke 21:36 Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.

Jesus clearly understood that it is possible for one to be "worthy to escape all these things." That is clear, now he also said in the same chapter but earlier in verse 20:

Luke 21:20-22 But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.

Again, something is very clear. Not only can one be found worthy, he gave additional instructions that if one finds himself in Jerusalem, when these things are unfolding to the point where Jerusalem is about to be surrounded here by armies, then (at this critical time) one is to flee Jerusalem and go to the mountains.

Incidentally the word "wilderness" as it is used in the bible, does not necessarily mean desolate, it simply means a place where few people live. It may even be capable of supporting life to some extent, but the very fact that few people live there is a pretty good indication that there is not a great deal there to support life. Very few people live on mountains, some do, most don't. So if one flees to a mountain, it's very unlikely that very many people will be found there.

Okay we can reach a conclusion. Conclusion #2: Jesus said, "*It is possible to be worthy*

to escape all these things."

In Revelation 3:10, Jesus is speaking of the congregation there—of and to, the congregation in Philadelphia.

Revelation 3:10-11 Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I come quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

Whoever these people are—this Philadelphia group—they are promised protection from the hour of trial that is to try the whole world. The hour of trial that is to try the whole world is the same as the tribulation, which is going to last, combined with the day of the Lord, three and one-half years. It runs at the same time as all those other events that we gave you a little bit earlier. So the Philadelphia group is promised protection from the hour of trial that is to try the whole world.

Revelation 3:16-19 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth. 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—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. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

At the same time that the Philadelphia group is promised protection, the Laodicean group is found so distasteful, so unqualified because of a lackadaisical, seemingly couldn't-care-less, worldly, sitting-on-the-fence, neutral attitude that is nothing less than idolatrous. Their problem is self-love and they show their lack of need of Christ by being unwilling to make the sacrifices of a slave of Jesus Christ. It is a scathing denunciation. They are to be spewed out for the purpose of going into the fire.

Fire, when used symbolically to represent a trial, is always viewed as either destructive, purifying or both. Meaning destructive to some, and purifying to others.

We can reach a conclusion here. Conclusion #3 is that lukewarm, uncommitted fence-sitters are going into the fire.

Revelation 3:8 I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

There is a tendency among us to think of this Philadelphia group as being without fault because Christ does not make a pointed and detailed listing of their sins. But I want you to notice something; He does say that they are of "a little strength"—that is, they are weak. Now I do not believe that this is a put-down. It is an honest appraisal. If I would reword it, I would say that He is commending them that they have done well with what they had. That puts a little bit different light on things. They have done well with what they had.

Let's be honest about this and think about this in terms of our lives in the church these last years —five, ten, fifteen, twenty or in my wife's and my case, thirty-three years. I don't think that—judging with what I have seen in my life—the Philadelphia group shows the spiritual strength of the beginning of the Ephesian group. If you understand what I mean, I don't see many mountains moving out of their place.

We are among that generation that is addressed when Jesus said, "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?" Look at those verses carefully and we will also find something missing that almost all assume is there. The verses do not say Philadelphia is full of brotherly love. Philadelphia is the name of the city—that assumption is drawn from the name of the city and not from something that Christ complimented them on. If we are going to be honest with the scriptures, it is then necessary that we do the same for each one of the groups, and no one (to my knowledge) has been able to make any kind of a significant conclusion for, let's say, Ephesus—the Ephesus group in regard to the Ephesus name, or Thyatira with the Thyatira's. There are only two that I know [whose names] do somewhat fit. The one is Philadelphia; the other is Laodicea which means, "*the judgment of the people*."

The Philadelphians do have one very fine quality—they are faithful. That's what He compliments them on, they are faithful. He is saying that they had a commendable measure of obedience.

If we reach that conclusion, the Philadelphians, though faithful, are yet somewhat weak. The Laodiceans are largely derived from a base that came or grows out *from* the Philadelphians. The Laodiceans are weaker still, because of their lackadaisical inattention to their relationship with God.

Now let's reach a conclusion. #4: The faithful people are the ones who are generally assured to be protected from the hour of trial. Faithful means loyal, it means trustworthy, it means people of integrity—they keep their word. Faithful people are generally assured to be protected from the hour of trial. Let's factor in another part of the end-time picture and that is that even though there is a way of escape, the bible is very vague in regard to some aspects of it. It is vague in regard to exactly who will go, where the place will be, how one will get there or when the time to leave will arise.

Now God wrote the book. He is wise beyond our comprehension, wise beyond our imagination and He didn't make a mistake when He wrote it the way that He did. It was not an oversight to leave this vague. He purposely left these things as vague as He did because He doesn't want us to focus on them. I can guarantee you that if our focus is on them, then we will not go to wherever that place is.

We can reach a conclusion again here. Conclusion #5: The bible is vague regarding the who, where, when and how of the place of safety. Thinking about Luke 21:36, where Jesus obviously says that there is a way for those who are worthy, I think we now need to spend a little bit of time in order to reach another conclusion. We need to spend some time exploring a way we can make ourselves unworthy, if that will help us to make sure our focus is in the right place.

Let's turn to Matthew:10 39. I'm going to string three scriptures together without a great deal of expounding until we get beyond the third one.

Matthew 10:34-39 Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to "set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." And "a man's foes will be those of his own household." He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

There is a treasure of information especially in those last two verses. "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it."

Matthew 16:24-25 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for

My sake will find it."

Everybody has a natural inclination within them to avoid suffering and pain and I am not saying to any of us that this is wrong. There is a drive within all of us to preserve our lives, to extend our lives. Self-preservation, it is said, is the first law of the universe and so we desire to make sure that we don't suffer any pain.

Yet on the other hand, here is Jesus who seems to be counseling us that, somehow or another, this drive for self-preservation, for self-satisfaction—this drive for comfort or whatever we might call it—has to be somehow be pushed out of the forefront of our lives and into a secondary place.

Let's turn to Luke 17:33, we'll read a few verses before that in order to get some of the flavor.

Luke 17:28-33 Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away. [We not only try to save what we are, we also try to save what we have.] And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back. ["You mean, leave my possessions behind? Whose going to watch it, if I'm not here to protect it? Somebody will take it and destroy it!"] Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.

Escaping what is surely a life-threatening situation at the end time is what is involved in the context here. Taking one's cross or seeking to find one's life does not mean bearing up under some difficult and awkward tragic burden. But brethren what he's talking about is dying to self, always the self wants to preserve itself. Always the self wants to satisfy the self, always the self seeks out comforts for the self. But when we become Christ's, we cannot do that because these self-satisfactions, this self-preservation, this seeking of comfort runs counter to—contrary to—the way of life that God has called us to, to obedience to His very commands.

Since we have the Holy Spirit, we have a dual nature, it can almost be said that we are schizophrenic. Truly, brethren, the one nature lives only in the death of the other. In

other words the divine nature lives only when human nature dies.

The lower is always with us. Human nature is there and it comes into its own—that is, it comes to the fore, it takes over when we let it. The higher one lives only when through faith we discipline ourselves to say "no" to the human nature whenever it wants to do things that God says is wrong. This means that one must say no to proud and sinful ego which not only puts itself first, but makes its own safety and comfort its primary aim.

Think of the context that we just read—carrying ones cross. Wasn't that crossbar an instrument of Christ's death? What Jesus meant is that if one is really going to be His slave—really going to be His servant—then it means that His servant—His slave, His begotten brother—is going to have to be willing to suffer the indignities of a condemned man. Unless a person overcomes being self-centered, and instead becomes God-centered, though he gains the whole world, he is nothing to God. If we had gone a little bit further in one of those contexts you would have seen that.

Brethren, lets face it, God's values are different from human nature's values. He is going to reward—this is just an illustration—people with death for the **very** focus of human nature: getting life. Do you see the problem? The problem is **getting**; its contained right there. That runs counter to the divine nature.

During life's routine days, it may seem as though our choices aren't all that important, but human nature is so deceitful that one can even make a right decision and then human nature deceives us into thinking that we have robbed ourselves of one of life's joys. It can make us feel bad for doing something good.

On the other hand, if one makes a wrong decision then human nature deceives us into saying to ourself, "*Why I have plenty of time to get myself turned around.*" If we aren't careful, it will get us coming and going. See why I said earlier that the lower nature lives only when we give it place. But it is always there, like a spring under tension that wants to spring out and exercise its will. Brethren be careful, don't fall for either.

This is the very thing Jesus is urging that we strive to avoid. If we allow human nature to have its way and try to get life, that is the very thing that is going to keep God from giving it. It means that we are living life carelessly, and that person will not be prepared for his Master's return because he is not really committed to it.

Let me put it another way: "*To deny oneself, means to say, 'NO' to self and 'YES' to Christ.*" It means to obliterate the self as the dominant principal of life and make God the ruling passion of one's life. So a Christian may have to sacrifice his personal

ambitions—his ease and comfort—the career that he might of enjoyed. All of us certainly will have to sacrifice our wills, because no Christian can do what he likes; he must do what Christ likes.

Now with that thought it brings us back to where we began this series—to fleeing and protection. It is not a question of what God can do; it is a question of what He purposes to do. You see I use this principal in regard to fleeing and the place of safety, and the church as a whole.

We need to apply that to us as individuals. It is very easy for one to look at the sorry record of the Laodicean there in Revelation 3 as stated by Christ, and to look down upon them with no small measure of contempt mixed with some pity. But if we allow ourselves to be defiled by that contempt, perhaps we better look at ourselves because that contempt may very well disqualify us.

Now lets reach a conclusion here. #6: A sure way to disqualify oneself is to strive to get to the place of safety. Now again, let's be honest, let's be realistic: Nowhere does Christ say that I am going to the place of safety. He does say that those who make it their aim in life **won't** be there. If anyone of us does make it there, does it automatically mean that those others who don't are Laodicean?

This is the next thing that I want us to consider. If someone does not make it there, does it automatically mean that person is Laodicean and that the tribulation is their consignment because they have not been spiritually zealous? I'm going to throw in a sense an enigma into this because I think that my study has shown that just the opposite may be true. Now go with me to Revelation 6:9 where we have the fifth seal—the tribulation.

Revelation 6:9-11 When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" And a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.

These are people who have been killed in the past. Many have been killed in the past as a witness. Incidentally the word "martyr" is the equivalent of our English word "witness."

However, through the years by usage the word "martyr" has come to mean, "*one who dies in service to a cause.*" These people died in service to God and to His cause—to His purpose. Can one assume that because God allows someone to die for the faith, then that person has been bad or weak—like we know that the Laodiceans are?

Hebrews 12:2-4 ...looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.

Is anyone of us going to accuse Jesus of being a lackadaisical fence-sitter; a fence-sitting ne'er-do-well? Jesus was **the** martyr for the faith. God allowed—and, indeed in this case, He willed it—that His servant Jesus of Nazareth was to be a martyr for all of mankind in order that the purpose of God might be carried out. We are forced therefore to ask the question, "*Were there others?*"

Hebrews 11:32-40 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 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—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony [witnesses, martyrdom] through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

Brethren, some of the greatest heroes of faith were allowed the painful experience of going through torture or being killed in tribulations and persecutions. Can we not add to these 11 of the 12 apostles? Were they not men of zeal and integrity, reflecting the very

character of God?

Let's go back to Luke 21:12. Again this is the Olivet prophecy.

Luke 21:12-19 But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake. But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony [witnessing, martyrdom]. Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will send some of you to your death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost. In your patience possess your souls.

It's obvious from verse 18 that he's not saying that these people will absolutely not die. Some of them indeed are going to die. When this is combined with Revelation 6:9-11, it shows that some—who were certainly not by *any* appearance at all Laodicean—are going to lose their lives as martyrs, as witnesses for God in the coming tribulation.

Well, brethren I am not saying these things because I want to throw you all off track. I am saying these things so we have a realistic appraisal of the future, and might understand the position that we are in so that we can do something effective in our life, during the time between now and then. I want us to have the correct focus and perspective regarding the place of safety. Our focus, brethren, is the Kingdom of God, not the place of safety. Our focus is serving God in whatever capacity He desires.

Second, I want us to have the right perspective toward ourselves and others, so that we might not think too highly of ourselves—that somehow we are better. Now that's another sure way to ensure going into the tribulation.

Romans 9:14-24 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? [Is there unrighteousness with God that His decision should be that some of us go into the tribulation?] Certainly not! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "Even for this same purpose I have raised you up, that I might show My power in you, and that My name might be declared in all the earth."

Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

So what is God's purpose? His general purpose is undoubtedly that He will spare some in a place of safety while others are consigned to the tribulation. Both of those are generalities, they are true generalities. But it's also true that it might be God's purpose—His calling—for some to be martyred even though they are zealous spiritually.

When we were baptized, we gave our lives to God to be used of Him in any way He saw fit. We became His slave. A slave is one who has no choice in matters. See, we became His slave in an exchange He was willing to make. We made a covenant with Him: in the exchange for the forgiveness of sin, we gave Him our life, and He in turn gives us the earnest of His Spirit as an advance on eternal life. The understanding is that He will then work to prepare us for His use now and in the Kingdom of God. Do we understand that, as His slave, we aren't free to serve just when it's convenient? We can't serve on our terms. God, because of what Jesus Christ has done and our acceptance by faith, has prior call on our lives. We are to put what we are and what we have at His disposal.

Let's reach a conclusion. #7: There are some whose calling by God includes making a powerful witness for Him during the tribulation, and that calling, brethren, may include death.

Revelation 11:7-11 Now when they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. [The "them" is the two witnesses] 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. 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. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one

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another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. 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.

Are we prepared to say that these men, the two witnesses, were not prepared for this responsibility? Most assuredly they were prepared by God for their testimony of Him, given in this way. God always prepares those who are going to witness for Him. Others whom God also prepares will be martyred during the tribulation along with other who did not prepare (i.e. the Laodicean).

Now I see six clearly defined groups living during the tribulation. Not all of them are going through it, though.

Group #1: Those He says He will keep from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole earth.

#2: Those of His regenerated children He will put into the fire because of their worldly, uncommitted, lackadaisical attitudes. Now I might add here that this is not an effort to destroy them through torture, but a last desperate crash program to save them. God is love and in His wisdom He knows what must be done on His part without taking away their free moral agency—their right to destroy themselves.

#3: The strong Christians, who God purposes to go through some of it, in order to make a strong personal witness for Him. Included in this group is, undoubtedly, the two witnesses.

#4: The 144,000 from the 12 tribes of Israel in Revelation 7.

#5: The innumerable multitude from all nations of Revelation 7.

#6: The rest, who fight Christ at His coming, and are led by the Beast and the false prophet.

I Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

This verse is a key. It is a key to help us to understand that God always supplies enough for us to carry out our part in His creative work. Not just in the tribulation, but also in every day decisions of everyday life. I don't know if you understand it, but this is one of the major themes of the Feast of Tabernacles. Regardless of where we are in the pilgrim journey, He supplies the need. God is faithful.

Let's go to something very fundamental. God has no responsibility to make Himself known to us. But He constantly does it because He loves us. He is the one that initiates contact with us. He is the one who grants repentance. He is the one who gives us His spirit. He is the one who continues with us and helps us to grow.

He is with us throughout the whole journey. He is faithful because that's what He is. He is not only faithful to His church as a whole; He is faithful to each and every one of us as an individual child of His. His salvation, brethren, includes not just being changed at the resurrection from the dead, but it also means the grace to overcome—to meet every trial along the way, so that we'll be prepared for whatever trial comes up in our life.

Matthew 24:45-48, 50-51 Who then is a faithful and wise servant [remember the faithful ones are the ones who are going to go to the place of safety], whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? [Listen to verse 46.] Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, "My master is delaying his coming," [Not really committed, fence sitting, lackadaisical] the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites.

For those who are faithfully doing the responsibilities he has given them and don't have their mind on something else—like saving our own skin—the relationship between us and God through faithfulness is kept unbroken. We have to strive to keep that relationship unbroken by periods of inattention or from being broken by periods of inattention to the one we are going to marry. Even as He is faithful, we must become faithful. It is a matter of the day-to-day attention to the things of God. It comes down to everyday.

Think of it in this light: I think a fairly good analogy would be when two people plan on marrying—the kind of attention that they give to one another day after day leading up to that marriage—wanting to spend time with one another. That is the kind of attention that

Christ is saying that we are going to have to give to Him. Brethren, to state it simply, He is not going to marry somebody He doesn't know. He is not going to marry someone who doesn't know Him.

Now let's begin to really wrap this up, in Colossians 3:1

Colossians 3:1-3 If then you were raised with Christ [that means coming up out of the water of baptism, just like it's a resurrection. Listen to this instruction:], seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

These verses sum up the true focus of our lives. If we would look at this in its context, going all the way back into chapter 2 where Paul was talking about an asceticism, it seems (to these Colossian people) as though it was something that was very spiritual. Paul, though, was instructing us to understand that the solution to dealing with carnal passions is in our relationship with Christ. Our focus must be to set our hearts on things above.

Brethren, there is a mystical relationship with Christ through the Holy Spirit. This is not an escape from reality nor a withdrawal from the stresses and strains of the world. That is made very plain by what Paul writes beginning in verse 5, where it takes a completely ethical turn to it. It is that our interest is centered on Christ, that our attitudes, ambitions and whole outlook are molded by our relationship to Him. That our allegiance to Him takes precedence over everything else, and that everything in our life is determined by that relationship.

Most of that covers verse 1 and so if verse 1 is descriptive of the aim or focus of our life, verse 2 has to do with our inner disposition toward it. Our attitude, brethren, has to be that we are **only** going to seek the Kingdom of God.

Everything is to be seen...everything that we do in life is to be seen against the background of God's Kingdom. We won't live as if *only* the things of this world matter. Our focus will be on pleasing God. Brethren, this is what changes us: it's the relationship that we take advantage of.

Certainly we have our part in this relationship, but the relationship opens to us a whole new set of values. We can no longer be satisfied with the base standards of this world. It means that God, people and things begin to be seen in their right perspective. Earthly

things that are in these two verses here might be understood in a broad sense as being wealth, power, worldly honor, social prestige, fashions in clothing, homes, furnishings, this world's entertainments such as athletics, movies, musical pleasures.

Did you notice something in those three verses? "*Our life is hidden.*" Do you see what he said there? It is the relationship that provides us with the protection and because God is God, even if He wills that it is His purpose that we go into the tribulation, we will be fully prepared to meet the challenges of **even** martyrdom. The strength, the spiritual strength, the faith in God, the love for God, the willingness to die for Him, if need be, will be there.

What an awesome understanding. God keeps His word; He will never allow us to go through something that He will not supply the strength for, because our life is hidden with His son.

Let's conclude with I Corinthians 16:13

I Corinthians 16:13-14 Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.
Let all that you do be done with love.

Doesn't that pretty much sum it up? That's being faithful. The way that Paul wrote this, these were not in his mind to be momentary attitudes, but continuous states. Brethren, this is what is developed and produced in us by God's spirit because of the relationship with Christ. And so when he says "watch," he's not talking about an occasional absence of sleep but a determined effort at wakefulness. It means being vigilant so that our spiritual liberty won't be endangered by compromising with anything in our environment.

It means not playing with temptations. He is telling us to be stable and not to be flitting from one fad and fashion to another like the people in this book (I Corinthians) were shown to be. He says, "*Be like men.*" He means, "*Be mature, stable, responsible to duty.*" He wants us to understand that nothing fine and good can be built if it's treated in a casual and informal, easygoing spirit.

He wants us to understand that being strong in God is not something inherent within us. Remember it doesn't come naturally. Human nature is at war against God. It resists seeking God. Being strong in God is derived from the relationship with Him, and this relationship must be worked at, even as a good relationship with another human being must be worked at.

Finally, "love" he says. He's talking here about the love of God. This is not a syrupy

affection with a lot of hugs or charm or social graces (though it may include those things). The bible in fact says that charm is deceitful and beauty is vain. He is not saying that they are evil, He is saying that they have the power to deceive us and others into thinking that because one is charming or beautiful, that they are somehow converted. He is warning us that those things might be nothing more than a carnal façade. Brethren, what is love?

Love is doing what is right from God's perspective. Remember this is the same apostle who admonished Timothy to rebuke people before all, even right before the congregation. If that's what it took, that was what was to be done, and it was an act of love. Love is being responsible, love is being honest, love is being loyal, trustworthy, faithful, love is being zealous toward God and it is other things as well.

Conclusion #8: The way to be prepared is to make the Kingdom of God our focus. To make sure that we are faithful day-by-day, and trust God by faith that He is working to prepare us for whatever purpose He has called us to.

With these eight points, I think that we ought to be able to have a very realistic view of what is facing us over the next number of years. Brethren, I want all of us to be in that group that is faithful, and which is considered worthy to go to the place of safety. I want us all to at least have the opportunity to use our time to show Christ that indeed we are faithful, and that we are, day-by-day, working to strengthen our relationship with Him. And if God so desires, I hope that we will understand that if at that time He does not take us to the place of safety, He has, in His love, decided that this is what we need. This is what He needs to do in order for our salvation to be complete.

So I hope that this gives us a more complete picture of this time that we are living in and facing.