

Rejoice In What We Are

We've Been Given a Great Gift

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 12-Jun-11; Sermon #1052B

Do you ever compare yourself in your lot in life with those of other people? Of course you do. Everybody does it. It might be considered as one of the great earth-wide human pastimes. We compare homes, and cars, and clothing, and money, and fame, and notoriety, and skills, and personalities, and accomplishments as well, but with whom or against whom are you most likely to make a comparison?

Are you going to compare yourself with the Pygmies in Central Africa, or the Maoris there in the Outback? How about the Amazon Indians in Brazil? A Calcutta in a midst of that teeming humanity there? How about an Afghani sitting up on his barren mountain, looking over the desert below, and saying, "This is my land"? No, I do not think so. How about even an American Indian who lives in this great land, and yet so many of them have almost nothing?

We might do this occasionally, but I do not think we do it to brag in any way. I think we do it maybe to say to ourselves, "I'm way better off than that person. That's for sure."

But more often than not, the tendency is for us to compare ourselves either with our peers, or even those we feel maybe are better. We do not even tend to compare ourselves with our brethren who are less well off than we. We seem to be especially likely to compare ourselves with the high achievers—the stars of the cinema, the stars in athletics, the stars in business who become wealthy. Maybe we might even envy them. Public fame and acclaim is something that attracts attention, and it will attract *our* attention as well. Those who seem to accomplish more, make more, lead more exciting lives, are in the public eye, and they are receiving adulation that we might enjoy having ourselves, but I think that we kind of would enjoy what we think of the ease of life that they seem to live, and that can even become a very serious covet.

It might be very interesting and maybe very helpful to evaluate who it is that you compare *yourself* with, and search for an answer as to why these are the people that we are comparing ourselves with. As a rule, whoever it is, we usually conclude that the comparison with these high achievers is not too good, and that has a resulting effect that tends to make us feel disadvantaged, and it puts kind of a pall on life.

Perhaps you graduated from high school with somebody that maybe you paid very little attention to. Maybe he was kind of nerdy or something. But then you hear later on that this person is a millionaire. I heard that of one of the fellows I graduated with was a millionaire, and I thought, "Oh no!" I really did not envy that he had the money, but I thought, "Why didn't *I* make money like him?" He did not seem all that great in high school, but whatever it was, he had something on the ball, and he made a great deal of money.

Anyway, it has the effect of possibly making us feel as though we are spinning our wheels and we are getting nowhere, and we seem tiny, maybe just a mere speck in a vast humanity, and our life is encompassed with endless trouble, and it seems like there is no escape. As far as we can see into the future, it looks as though it is not going to change. It seems as though we are barely skimming by. We live from paycheck to paycheck in a dull, drab existence.

Now for some, they may even get quite depressed, feeling that they are being picked upon, and other types of self-pity thinking. Maybe we even think that whenever the brains were handed out, "Why was I standing behind the door?" I did not even know I was *behind* the door! Now I look back and I see I *was* behind the door! At least, that is the way I think. "Why can't I get a break? I put in my eight hours a day, or more, and I think that I'm trying hard. I'm really studying on my job. I'm trying to improve myself. I'm trying to make the boss be pleased with my work, and I just keep churning along and I don't seem to be getting ahead."

As we begin this sermon, we are going to take a look at one segment of our culture's high achievers, and these happen to be the astronauts. Just a few of them; not all of them. Just some of them. These profiles I am going to give you are drawn from an article that appeared in *The National Observer*, which

was a national magazine put out by the Dow Jones people. They discontinued it five or so years after I got this. This article was in the May 17, 1975 issue. It is old information, but it is still valid as far as I am concerned. It has been 36 years since this article appeared, but I think the principles you will find in this article are just as valid today because something like this just does not change.

The name of the article was, "What Do You Do After You Have Walked On The Moon?" What is left? Can you imagine what a small segment of the population that includes? It has been expanded just a little bit from those four men who actually walked on the moon. I think it was only four men, but there were others who went with those men, and they circled around above while Neil Armstrong and those were on the surface of the moon. We are talking about a *very small* segment of the population.

Now listen to the way the writer of this article describes or profiles these people.

Neil Armstrong: He is described in this article as enigmatic, puzzling, a withdrawn man who speaks in a frustrating emotionless monotone. He seems evasive, and he never answers you directly. Everything goes off in a bleak angle.

That is quite a personality he has got to envy, is it not? No, it is not. He did achieve, and of the astronauts, he was picked as being the one best to put on the moon. But listen to that personality again: Frustratingly emotionless, monotone, evasive, and answers indirectly.

Buzz Aldrin: He also walked on the moon. For him, when he came back, his splash down was hard. Psychologically, he did not come back all in one piece. He and his wife divorced after he had an emotional breakdown.

Al Bean: It sounds like just a name. You cannot get one more common than that. He had family problems, and he confessed he had a withdrawn son that he was not able to get through to. Al Bean was a very intelligent man, quick-witted, probably a person

who was able to perceive problems, anticipate them, and work on them so that his life would be a success, but he had a son who was withdrawn. It makes you wonder about the kind of contact there was within the family.

Edgar Mitchell: After he came back he dabbled in parapsychology. He was always trying to see scientific kind of things that other people did not see. He and his wife divorced. It is like there was a family problem there as well.

James Irwin: He found religion up there on the moon, and when he got back he founded a non-profit organization and established a spiritual retreat. James and his wife also divorced.

John Young: He describes himself as a loner. He admitted that he had no interest outside of his job and his home life. It must not have been too good. He and his wife also divorced.

Are you keeping tally of all the divorces and the withdrawn children?

About the same time of the year—it was also May, but this time in 2001—an article appeared in the *Charlotte Observer* newspaper. It was an article that was written because the woman who wrote the article was stunned. She had this friend who, at the age of 27, had a very high-paying job, and seemed to be highly respected by everybody—by the people she worked for, and by the people she did business with. It seemed as though she really had it all together. And then bang! She committed suicide. Everybody was asking questions. "Why?" Why should anybody who was achieving so much and had so many friends (at least on the surface) commit suicide? But something was eating away with that young woman on the inside, and she felt that she could not go on, and she ended her life.

I think we are beginning to see, that despite the high achievement of some people who really seem to have a great deal on the ball, they really do not have problems any different from you and me.

Turn with me to I Corinthians 10:13, a scripture we turn to very often in order to find some measure of encouragement as we go through our Christian life, and I believe this is truly one of the most encouraging verses in the entirety of the Bible.

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.

The reality of that verse, to anyone believing, wipes away from us any reason to ever commit suicide. In a sense, it wipes away and keeps depression from getting really deep within us so that we are so discouraged that we want to give up. It removes that from the picture as well, because here we have the very Creator—the One who is creating Himself in us—who says that what we are going through is something that can be borne. But you see, it only works that way if we believe it, and at the same time are willing to bear up under the trials of life. Really and truly believing that God says what He means and means what He says when He says He is actually overlooking our life and He is not going to allow anything to happen to us that is beyond our ability to overcome it; at the very least, to bear up under it.

It is important to our well-being to understand that these high achievers have the same variety of problems that everyone experiences. Their fame, their monetary fortune, their academic and professional accomplishments have not proved to be an advantage to help them avoid many of the very things that trouble us.

The first thing we want to draw our attention to now is that God's testimony to you and to me is that what we experience in life is *common* to man, and that is what we see here. The high achievers have the same problems we do. They have marital problems. They have money problems. They have withdrawn child problems, and whatever. So seemingly, having more brains, having more money, more ease and fame has not insulated them from divorce, from withdrawn, alienated children or spouses, emotional breakdowns, and health problems.

The word "common" indicates "nothing exceptional." Our problems are nothing beyond the powers of endurance or the powers of overcoming. There is another word in there that is helpful to understand a little bit more, and that is the word "taken," translated "overtaken" in the first phrase: "No temptation has overtaken ..." This is written in the perfect tense, and it indicates "being grabbed by." "No problem has grabbed us or taken us, or captured and carried us away." What it means then within the context, indicating that the temptation or the problems God is referring to that are common to man, is something that is chronic. It is a lasting condition. That is an admission from God that the problems we have as Christians are not mostly going to go away, but the problem of overcoming and growing in a Christian life is something that we are going to have to carry or bear with over the course of our conversion period.

There is another word—the word "escape." "He will also make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it." This indicates that God sees us the way we are and (if I can describe it), He sees us as though we are in a box canyon. We are in a narrow defile—a tight spot. It seems as though we are boxed in or surrounded, but He promised that He will give us a way out of the situation, not necessarily to escape the whole thing, but at least to be able to bear it. It is going to be a *chronic* condition.

The word "temptation" adds to our understanding. It tends to indicate something designed. Here comes God into the picture: something designed. On top of that it also indicates something unavoidable. Do we think we are going to escape it before we get into it? If God is in our life, He will take steps to make sure that it is going to achieve a purpose in us that is good for recreating Himself in us, and there is not going to be any escaping it. He is going to make sure it happens. Why? Because we need it to prepare us for that responsibility for which He is preparing us, whether that responsibility is in this life, or whether it is going to be in the Kingdom of God. There is no getting out of it.

It is like, if God plans a test, and you get to school on Monday morning and you find out about it, so you take the day off. You skip class. You go to school on Tuesday, and He says "Ah ha! I delayed it for you till today! You still have to take it." You see, you have Somebody watching over you who is able to manipulate events to make sure that you get into the situation He

wants you to get into. You can see this back in Deuteronomy 8, for example, where God says, "I made them go hungry." That shows He was involved there. He wanted to see how they were going to react to being hungry, or being thirsty, or being attacked, or whatever it was.

The important thing for you and me is that God is faithful. It indicates then that our difficulties in life can be successfully met, and that God, by this verse, is our Guarantor. The problems can be met, and the problems can either be overcome, or the problems will at least be borne with while He works things out.

I said in a sermon just a week ago ["Wilderness Wandering (Part 4)"] that we have to understand that there are some cases in life where the problems cannot be solved, and there are reasons they cannot be solved. We have to be able to see God working in our lives, to know that God knows it, and He might be the very One that might be keeping it from being solved. So we are not necessarily disappointing Him at all when we are having to bear up under this thing, whatever it might be, and God is the One who is keeping it there, and He might be keeping it there in order to make sure that His will is done.

Do you think that Paul, whenever he was sent to prison, thought, "Oh, this is the end"? It was not the end, because God made it possible for him to write four books of the Bible while he was there, and then He set him free for awhile. The second time he went in, it *was* the end. We might get into a tight spot, but from it God will create something that is very good while we are in that tight spot, and He will let us out, or keep us there according to His will. I know this is hard to adjust to, but we must understand that God is there, and because He is there, it does not mean at all that He is disappointed in us.

There is no doubt that life is difficult, but being a high achiever in the world does not guarantee that one will escape those difficulties.

Now Pentecost has a great deal to do with pointing us in the right direction to enable enduring and overcoming these long-lasting problems that are common to mankind.

We are going to look for awhile at the writings of a man who knew a very great deal about life's trials, and he wrote about them very often. That man is

Solomon, and we are going to look in Ecclesiastes 3. Solomon is talking about, and he is reflecting upon, life. Most definitely he is reflecting on his *own* life, and these are conclusions, observations that he made as he was trying to reason this thing through.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 To everything there is a season. A time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. [And then he says:] What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

Of the astronauts that I named earlier, the only one who gave any evidence that he thought he knew what God is doing, is James Irwin. I believe he has since died, but he at least believed that he had it, started that retreat, and I believe he eventually became a minister. But he was the only one.

Let us understand an overview of what God, through Solomon, is saying here in these first eleven verses. Let us look again at verses 9-11, because this is the key really to this section.

Ecclesiastes 3:9-11 What profit has the worker [The worker is you and me.] from that in which he labors? I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

Verses 9-11 involve God directly as a brief explanation for why these events or circumstances in the first 8 verses seem to occur in all of mankind regardless of one's station in life. That is the important point there. These things, Solomon is saying, seem to occur to everybody regardless of whether they are a king or whether they are a pauper.

Now, understand Solomon's attitude in this book was not always that good. He is saying, in effect, that things are frustratingly out of control even for a person as intelligent and as powerful as Solomon. In a sense, he is saying, "Here I am, a king. I've been gifted by God, and yet these things are happening to *me*. Why?" He did not know the complete answer to that, and that is what he is trying to find here in the book of Ecclesiastes.

One thing that I believe God wants us to begin with is that nobody completely controls all of life, beginning with one's birth and death. Here there are 14 pairs of opposite events and almost everybody goes through some form and intensity of them, and it seems as though they are all designed to occur, and indeed verses 9 through 11 indicate that particular point very strongly.

I am going to read verses 9 through 11 to you from two different modern translations, and they are a little bit helpful. Just using modern language, we can see then a little bit more clearly what Solomon said in those verses.

Ecclesiastes 3:9 [Moffatt Translation] What does a busy man gain from his toil? I have watched the interests that God sets the sons of men to labour at.

That is very interesting, because now Solomon is saying that God is causing these 14 pairs of opposites to occur to everybody in some form, in some measure. It does not matter who you are, you have to go through these things in order to walk the course that God has given.

Ecclesiastes 3:9-11 He assigned each [meaning either person or event] to its proper time, but for the mind of man he has appointed mystery [God has set eternity in their heart], that man may never fathom God's own purpose from beginning to end.

Now if Solomon could not understand this stuff, you can understand why these high achievers, who even go to the moon and are so schooled beyond our belief in certain areas of mathematics and science and so forth, cannot figure it out. Neither can all the psychologists and psychiatrists and these doctors of sociology figure it out. But Solomon was wise enough and humble enough to admit, "I see these same things happening to everybody in principle."

Ecclesiastes 3:9-11 [Amplified Version] What profit remains for the worker from his toil? I have seen the painful labor and exertion and miserable business which God has given to the sons of men in which to exercise and busy themselves. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He also has planted eternity in men's hearts and minds a divinely implanted sense of a purpose working through the ages which nothing under the sun but God alone can satisfy, yet so that men cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

I am going to point out some phrases from both of these verses that I think will help you a little bit, because there are some interesting terms in those two translations that give us a clear sense of what is intended: "painful labor" and "business," because to Solomon, that is the way a person's life seems to be. Painful labor and business. Work, work, work. Work, work, work. Work, work, work. Never have enough money. Work, work, work. Painful labor and business.

Here is another one. "For the mind of man God has appointed a mystery." Now man hid himself from God at the very beginning. Is that not what Adam and Eve did? They hid themselves from God, and God reciprocated. So nobody can find God now except those to whom God gives the great gift of revealing Himself. So Solomon sees these people, and everybody is going around in a fog. See—"Why are we born?"

Here is another one: "Assign each in its proper time." Solomon perceived that these 14 steps of opposites seem to be timed purposely by somebody, some power, so that it hits everybody at sometime in their life. Guess who is doing that?

And then another one: "A divinely implanted sense of a purpose." God has endowed each one of us with a concept that we believe that there is something greater to life than the way it is being lived right now, and that is true. Do not people believe there is something beyond death? They may not have any truth, but somewhere within them there is this idea that there is a meaning to life, and whatever that meaning is, it is awesome. They of course come to the conclusion that they are going to go off to heaven. That is not the right answer, but I am just saying that there is something there in man. It is a divinely implanted sense of purpose that only God can satisfy.

It is also interesting to consider from this paragraph that Solomon, despite all the power in his office as king, plus his intellectual gift and wisdom, found that life had a frustrating quality to it that was beyond even his control. One of the additional things that he sees here is that it seems as though life took serious turns that even he, Solomon, could not anticipate and could not control.

Take note of these things. You had no control over at all if God called you. That just came out of the blue. That is what he is talking about. But God does things. Solomon does not attribute it necessarily to God, but he could see that many events occur in a person's life that are completely beyond his control, and are completely beyond his ability to anticipate that they were going to happen. They just did.

So I ask you, "Do you see God?" This is all-important to our life, and we should have this concept in our mind so that we are seeking God at all times and we see Him as operating in our lives. We are not exactly sure all the time that He has done something, but at least we are willing to begin considering that maybe He *did* do this, or He did something else that either helped or slowed us down, or whatever.

Did not Herbert Armstrong say in his autobiography that it later came to him that God simply swept away his very profitable and lucrative business? It was gone. He was making big amounts of money in the advertising business, and suddenly it was gone through no fault of his own. He had not changed, but God took it away. He never replaced any of it for seven years.

It is about as close as Solomon comes to admitting that God is manipulating events in people's lives. He could see it was happening and he left little hints that was the way he was thinking, but he had no proof for it, as we will see in just a little bit.

Let us ask a question here. Why is it this way? What went wrong? What was lost, brethren, was the result of what happened in Eden, and it has continued to plague mankind ever since. We might be able to name a number of things to be correct, but I feel that one of the major things that has gone bad is that faith, in the form of trust by man toward God, was destroyed. This is what Adam and Eve lacked. Even when they were in the Garden, even when they saw God with their eyes, they still did not have faith to believe what God said, and they accepted the proposition from Satan, and boom! Things really changed, and the contact with God was gone.

So following Adam's and Eve's sin, God set in motion a program, a purpose, and a plan in which mankind would never be able to know God or His purpose without a calling in which God would deliberately reveal it. Then He required all of those to whom He revealed to live by faith, choosing to trust the Revelator. So the purpose would be worked out by means of a continuing revelation of Himself and His purpose by putting those called through events like the 14 pairs of opposites, moving, shaping, forming, testing, and evaluating each of us individually and as a group in order to complete His purpose.

Solomon is saying the events seem to be predetermined and beyond control, and that they happen whether one wants them or not. To a very large degree, he is correct. We may not be able to stop them, but we can, because of our calling, make the best possible use of them because the mystery is revealed. This is something, brethren, for you and me to really, really rejoice in.

We have something that Solomon did not have. None of us even begins to measure up carnally to what Solomon was. We do not measure up to the high achievers in our age. We do not have the education. We do not seem to have the mind that even begins to compare to them. We have not been selected to do anything like they did. They really were a select group of people, and yet we have something they do not have.

God Himself tells us in I Corinthians 1:26 that He has called the weak of the world. Why did He do it? In order to confound the mighty. Who? *Them*? In fact there was a television program that was on the other night named "Them." It turned out to be giant ants. It was a 1951 or 1954 Sci-Fi thriller that took place out in the desert. But we are "them." This is a *good* "them."

Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 All this I have proved by wisdom. I said, "I will be wise"; but it was far from me. [He could not figure out the problem that was before him.] As for that which is far off and exceedingly deep, who can find it out? I applied my heart to know, to search and seek out wisdom and the reason of things, to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness. And I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God shall escape from her, but the sinner shall be trapped by her. "Here is what I have found," says the Preacher, "adding one thing to the other to find out the reason, which my soul still seeks but I cannot find: One man among a thousand I have found, but a woman among all these I have not found. Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes."

Solomon wants to comprehend what is going on, but brethren, in his life he could not, because he did not have a calling, and so he is a confused man in his carnality. Despite the intellectual brilliance, he could not truly put his finger on why life should be as it is, and to some degree seems to be out of control. So here in these verses he draws special attention to his experiences with his harem. Do you know what his conclusion was? The reality is that he found that there was no solace, no comfort to the burning issue of this book: "Where is God?" "What is going on?" He found that having many sexual partners was not the answer. Well, we will mark that one off!

Ecclesiastes 8:16-17 When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, even though one sees no sleep day or night, then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labors to discover it, yet he will not find it; moreover, though a wise man attempts to know it, he will not be able to find it.

So I remind you, of the astronauts mentioned in the article, of that group only James Irwin thought that he knew what was going on spiritually, and the others generally felt as though going to the moon only complicated what they knew about life. It did not relieve a thing.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus admonished us not to be overly concerned about the future, but that concern is a reason why so many people in the church are so acutely focused on prophecy. But Solomon seems to be saying that the more one searches, the more one is puzzled. You see this over and over through the book. He keeps looking, but the fruit of it was his contentment was constantly disturbed. He just got more and more frustrated. It left him puzzled.

Because God has put a quest for eternity in man's heart, men want a fuller explanation and will make great efforts to discover the mystery even (as he says here) in a virtually sleepless quest. "Work night and day," Solomon said, but he says all these efforts will be futile. We will never find the great mystery because God is sovereign, and God has determined that He must reveal.

A man cannot find why he was born. Unless a person is called, even if it is *told* him, he will be too preoccupied with other things from his own world of interests that he will not recognize it, nor will he accept it. Since it is not physically discerned, and the man is oriented toward that which is physical, he overlooks its importance in his own well-being, and off he goes.

Winston Churchill said you can hit some people with the truth right in the face, and they pick themselves up and go on, and it never disturbs their thinking. He was a man who had some experience with that. He kept beating the drum before World War II, and said over and over again that Hitler was going to make war. Nobody—and I mean *nobody*—seemed to believe him, but it happened. Maybe that is where he got the idea.

This principle that we are talking about here is very important to you and me. Not only has it been revealed, but God has a requirement that He has laid down for you and me, and that is that we have to continually seek Him. In other words, there is initial revelation of the mystery, but when God reveals, He only reveals a portion of it, and He has determined that He wants to make

things so that we willingly, voluntarily give ourselves toward learning more and increasing our understanding and effectiveness in life in glorifying Him.

Let us go to I Samuel 3. What he says here is meaningful to this subject.

I Samuel 3:1 Now the boy Samuel ministered to the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation.

I think we can say that is the way it is in *our* world. "The word of the Lord is rare, and there is no widespread revelation." We are looking at a situation that not only suited Samuel's day, it also suits ours.

Let us understand this a little bit better. This takes place among God's covenant people, and those who should have known God and had been ready to do His will. When he says that the word of God was rare in those days, he meant that the truth was not being preached. That is what we would say today. The word was there, but it was not being preached. This takes place during the period of the judges, and you know the book of Judges ends with the statement, "Every man did what was right in his own eyes," which gives you an indication that this was the way the people were leading their lives, and therefore you can understand why the word of the Lord was not being preached. Nobody was going to obey it anyway even if there was a priest who was willing to preach it. Maybe there were some few. God's word never completely dies out, but in the overall sense, it was rare.

Let us translate this a little bit more into something more applicable to daily life. In other words, the people were not being submissive to what they *did* know of God and His purposes, and the sum of this is to show that one's attitude and response toward what has already been revealed is going to pretty much determine God's continuing revelation. Do you understand that? In other words, in order to keep the flow of knowledge from God going, those who already have it have to be applying what they already know, and if they are responding to God in that manner, the revelation will keep on coming. It is like watering the garden. If you do not water the garden, it goes dry and the growing does not take place.

We have had the way of God revealed to us, and God Himself revealed that the way you keep it flowing is to do what God says: Seek Him. And the way we seek Him is to try to be like Him in the way we live our life. When we do that, He is happy, and He gives us more gifts.

Let us look at this in the life of one of the very interesting kings that Richard was talking about ["I Will Build My Church"] in II Chronicles 15. Verse 2 is really a significant verse for you and me in understanding how, if I can put it this way, we can get gifts from God.

II Chronicles 15:1-2 Now the Spirit of God came upon Azariah [a prophet] the son of Oded. And he went out to meet Asa [the king], and said to him: "Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you

You can get a picture here of two walking together. But what if those two are not walking together, and one is going in one direction, and the other is going in the other direction, and the one that is going in the other direction is God, and so this admonition here cannot be met because we have to be walking *with* each other.

Brethren, it is a matter of reciprocity. We have to respond. It is that clear. When we respond, the vision from God, the revelation from God, will continually be expanded bit by bit by bit. We have got to make it go. We do not want to be like Solomon, looking from the outside in. So Solomon, despite all his intelligence, despite all his power and position, despite him being a high achiever, could not figure it out.

Let us try the book of Lamentations 2. This takes place in a time of terrible circumstances. Jeremiah is describing here the devastation of the city, and the resulting physical and spiritual condition of the people.

Lamentations 2:9 Her [Jerusalem's] gates have sunk into the ground; He [God] has destroyed and broken her bars. Her king and her princes are among the nations [They have been scattered.]; the Law is no more, [The law of course can never pass away. It means

it is not spoken at all.] And her prophets find no vision from the LORD.

There is no prophetic revelation from the Lord. That is kind of interesting because it is saying there that the ministry's ability to give sermons that are understandable and are truly leading to the Kingdom of God and have the power of conviction and understanding will be determined by the people's response to what they already have.

The ministry, in a sense, is tied to the whole group's response to God. The better the response to God, the greater the revelation is going to be, and the more conviction and power there is going to be in what we say. You then are going to benefit from that because God will give His gifts of understanding to His people.

Let us go to Proverbs 29, verse 18. This is another one of those very familiar scriptures in which the words "revelation" and "vision" are contained.

Proverbs 29:18 Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but happy is he who keeps the law.

The word "revelation" in the KJV says "vision." "Where there is no vision. . ." It is talking about the same kind of vision that we just read of there in Lamentations 2:9, and what we also saw in I Samuel 3:1. It means something that is clear and seen and understood in terms of preaching and instruction.

In each one of those places the word "revelation" and "vision" is exactly the same Hebrew word that is underlined in every case. And so without revelation, what does this verse say? People cast off restraint. You see, where there is real vision, real revelation from God, it encourages people to overcome, to grow, and God is enabling the people to do that.

Are you beginning to see something developing here? It is God responding to us, and our efforts to seek Him. His response is to give messages through His ministry that are understandable and applicable to those who are in the congregation, and they can use it. They glorify God, and that makes God even happier because the gifts He gives are being returned in Him being glorified by the conduct and the attitude of His people.

The *Living Bible* has something here that gives very good sense. It says, "Where there is no revelation [or vision], the people run wild." That does not mean they are running around like wild men. Not at all. It just means that they are not mad men, but they are running, walking, without direction or purpose as to what they are doing with their life. It is just being lived. One goes this way, and one goes that way, another one goes another way, and instead of everybody being unified with the same lessons, with the same understanding, with the same instruction, the same pictures in their mind, and enthusiasm, everybody is going his own way, and we have a Judges situation: "Everybody does what is right in his own eyes."

Do you know what that verse describes? It describes liberalism. Everybody is doing what *they* think is right, and what *is* right is God's Word, His law, His understanding. When everything is in tune with God, then the people are going in the right direction and everybody is on the same basic path. Everybody is not on the same *place* on the path, but everybody is on the same path, and that is great, and there is real spiritual unity.

So we have scriptures here that point to what happens to a people who *do* have a revelation but do not use it, and what happens to a people who have *no* revelation at all, like Solomon. But the result is exactly the same. That is, people living spiritually aimless, purposeless lives.

Therefore, since we are a covenant people, our attitude toward what we have is extremely important to making use of the revelation given because it is adherent to God's revealed will that brings the blessings that are everywhere represented by this word "happy." "Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but happy is he who keeps the law" [Proverbs 29:18]. These people have a sense of contentment, a sense of well-being despite the fact that they have trouble. God is on His throne, and God will provide.

Here comes a question then. Do you believe that *you* have been given revelation from God? A simple question. The answer should be "yes." You have something that the high achievers do not have. They have no revelation. They are running wild. *We* have revelation. What are we doing with it? I feel

that this is so important I do not believe that its value can be over-estimated, because this revelation is very much needed for us to have a sense of direction and a sense of well-being about life.

The times that we live in are oppressive and they are depressive, and it is not hard at all to let them give us a sense of hopelessness. But we *do* have the revelation from God, and therefore the mystery of life, and though we do not have it all, we still have the most valuable pieces of knowledge that can be given to anybody anywhere in the world. We have what could make everybody's life—including the high achievers, the rich and the famous, the powerful and the intelligent—complete, because it would give them the proper direction to vent their gifts into something that is truly useful. We have not at all been short-changed when the door was open and God said, "Come in." So they may be rich in power, they may be rich in intelligence and prestige, fame, social influence, and worldly education, but brethren, we are wealthy beyond measure and what matters regarding life and its purpose.

Let us add something to this.

Isaiah 65:8-10 Thus says the LORD: "As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one says, 'Do not destroy it, for a blessing is in it,' so will I do for My servants' sake, that I may not destroy them all. I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah an heir of My mountains; My elect shall inherit it, and My servants shall dwell there. Sharon shall be a fold of flocks, and the Valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down for My people who have sought Me.

This is directed at a certain people, and there is a great wonderful blessing that is contained within these verses. This is one actually of quite a number of scriptures that prophesy of a very small number of people who will inherit the Kingdom of God, and they are referred to in verse 10 as "My people who have sought Me."

How many people are really seeking to be *like* God? Not looking to find Him; seeking to be *like* Him? It is not very many, because it is something that is lost and hidden, because God must reveal Himself in every case to everybody, and He has not chosen to do that. This "seeking Him" means the

sense of working, striving to be like Him, to imitate Him, to be patterned after Him.

There is a very sad story in this same book. We are just going to look at it without much in the way of expounding. I will read it, and you will understand it very quickly. Again, this is God speaking.

Isaiah 5:1-10 Now let me sing to my Well-beloved A song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard: [Israel is the vineyard, and I am taking this principle over into the church. It fits. I am not doing anything wrong here.]

My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it; so He expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes. [An unexpected harvest or an unanticipated one, or something different from what He wanted.] "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it? [That is, to make it produce the right thing.] Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: [Here comes God's response.] I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; and break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned or dug, but there shall come up briers and thorns. [We see God's reciprocation here is not very good. It is the opposite of the people who seek Him.] I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it." For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry for help. Woe to those who join house to house; they add field to field, till there is no place where they may dwell alone in the midst of the land! In my hearing the LORD of hosts said, "Truly, many houses shall be desolate, great and beautiful ones, without inhabitant. For ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield one ephah."

God planted Israel as a pleasant vineyard to bring forth fruit, but it produced the wrong kind of fruit.

Now back to Isaiah 65 again. He is giving a pretty strong hint here in verse 8 when He says there is a blessing in the vineyard.

Isaiah 65:8 Thus says the LORD: "As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one says, 'Do not destroy it, for a blessing is in it.'

Now you know from the circumstances we read in Isaiah 5 that it is not going to be a great blessing, but there is a blessing there—a small one. What is that blessing when we think of Israel as a nation, and also the vineyard, and yet is like a cluster here, a cluster there, that it does have something that is good there.

Think of the cluster as being people, and maybe in that cluster there is only one or two that are really good. What are we talking about here? What we are looking at here is part of the remnant doctrine, that out of a great nation, out of a great number of people, there are a few that have the truth, and they are bringing forth the right fruit even in the midst of the corruption and the destruction and all of the violence by which they are surrounded in the vineyard when you would think there was *nothing* there that was any good. "Oh yes," God says, "there *is* something good there! Right in that cluster over there is something in there. Don't destroy that little blessing that is there."

Do you know what He is saying then in the next few verses?

Isaiah 65:8-9 So will I do for My servants' sake, that I may not destroy them all. I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah an heir of My mountains;

Out of all of those grape clusters there is one here, and one there, and in it God says that because of them—that small remnant—He will not destroy the whole thing.

Isaiah 65:10 Sharon shall be a fold of flocks, and the Valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down for My people who have sought Me.

Sharon and Achor were two well-known locations in Israel, and He is showing that those areas will blossom forth in great beauty and productivity, and it will be done because of those who seek Him. So He is prophesying that the dangerous oppressive and depressive spirit of the world is going to come to an end, and it will end because of God's mercy extended for that tiny number of people who are giving Him pleasure: the remnant. Brethren, that remnant is the church. He is talking about the time of the end here.

Romans 9:1-5 I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.

Why would he have that kind of a statement? Because he knew where they were headed.

Romans 10:1-3 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.

There is the problem.

Romans 11:1-5 I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, "LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life"? But what does the divine response say to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

We are not the only ones who have ever felt that we live in a culture that operates in a spiritual, moral, and ethical confusion that produces violence, oppressively discouraging and dangerous times. Not since the Flood has the entire world lived so close to the edge of extinction. But there is still reason for hope, and that hope is for those who are part of the remnant.

We will close this with another question. Do you believe that *you* are part of the remnant? And if you are, then we not only have the revelation, but we have all of the promises that are given to the remnant in addition to the fact that we know God, and we know what He is doing. He has also, as it were, put us in His pocket to preserve us through the trouble that is coming on this world. What a gift! All the intelligent and intellectual power that these high achievers have is not going to preserve them from what is coming. But God, in His mercy, has made us what we are. It was *He* who called us. It was *He* who found us. We did not find Him. All we did was respond when He called, and He was the One who enabled us to respond by saying, "Here I am, Lord. Use me."