

Don't Be Indifferent (1995)

Steadfast Faithfulness

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The thought struck me the other day that there is more written about Trumpets than any other holy day. Indeed, there may be more written about Trumpets than all the other holy days combined. Now, we have been told that about one third of the Bible is prophecy and that about 90% of that one third is largely what Trumpets is about.

We are going to begin at a place that we almost always begin in Leviticus 23. But I want to pick up on a word. It is not going to carry very far through the sermon, but I think it provides a good foundation for our beginning.

Leviticus 23:23 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a Sabbath rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation.'"

Now, Trumpets is not only about end time events. I mentioned earlier about 90% of the prophecy probably revolves around Trumpets, but not everything about Trumpets is about something that is yet in the future; it is a *memorial*. Memorials are normally established on the dates of things that have already occurred in the past, usually at some event that was significant in the founding, or certainly in the history of a nation—something in which a great leader arose, or liberties were assured; maybe some great disaster occurred, or some great rescue. It could be anything along that line. The Feast of Trumpets is no different.

There are those who say (speculating I guess) that Trumpets is a memorial of creation, or perhaps maybe re-creation (a little bit more specifically correct). We might say there that it might be a memorial of the earliest event in God's plan for man.

There are also strong implications in Psalm 81 about Joseph's redemption from prison to second in command in Egypt, all in one day that occurred to him. But the sum of these things is that whether looking backwards or forwards, Trumpets is a solemn day. It is a holy convocation.

Now, "solemn" seems to fly in the face of the day itself, where it says that it is a memorial of trumpets. It can be said that it is, "a memorial of shouting for joy." In *The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge* it says it is, "a memorial of trumpets," or "shouting for joy with trumpets." That is still a solemn day.

Solemn does not mean it is a sad day. Certainly, very disturbing things are going to happen on this day. But it does not mean that our attitude toward this memorial should be sad. But rather it is a time for "very serious reflection" on what the day pictures.

I heard this morning on a news broadcast, a person being interviewed in regard to the activities that were going on in one of the synagogues here in Charlotte. The speaker said a word in Hebrew that I did not know. He said that the word means, "turning." Then the speaker went on to explain a little bit more. He said that Trumpets is the first day of turning; the first of ten days that ends with Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement. What they mean is that (as far as the Jews are concerned) it is a day for solemn reflection; for a person to begin turning away from his sins, and turning toward God.

There is reason to understand this in an Old Testament light because of the things that Trumpets memorializes. There is also good reason for us to think of it in terms of the end time because of what Trumpets is going to produce—a great turning toward God. It is going to be the great day of turning away from sin, and turning toward God—first Israel, and then all mankind are going to be at-one with God. So this day memorializes a turning that mankind is going to be making in the future.

Trumpets is unique in a way that no other holy day can claim. It is right in the middle of seven holy days; it is the fourth. There are three preceding it, and three following; it is the pivot for that which precedes, and that which follows. The whole of God's plan hinges or turns on what this day represents.

Some of you may recall a sermon that I gave at the Feast of Tabernacles in Palm Springs. I believe it was in 1989. It was entitled, "What is a Prophet?" A large part of that sermon was a description of what I called an axial period. An axle is a shaft on which something turns, usually a wheel, gear, or pulley.

In a historical context, axial is a word derived from the word axle. An axial period, then, is a section of time during which pivotally historical events occur, which turns civilization to a configuration that it never had before. It is usually a period of very significant wars, social upheavals, upsets in the weather, the rise of religions; these things all combine in order to bring about a great deal of change.

The period that I used as my model occurred mostly during the sixth century ^{BC}. These things are even recorded in the Bible (at least we will see them in general in just a bit). But, during the century that encompassed part of the seventh century ^{BC} and part of the sixth century ^{BC}, Israel virtually disappeared from view. Assyria rose to be a great power, smashed Israel, and then boom, they fell apart. They also virtually disappeared from view. Also, whatever happened to Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia? They are not great nations now. I think we would have a difficult time locating them ethnically anywhere. But when these nations fell, when the wheel of history turned, those nations were replaced by Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Those nations rose and fell, and the others are barely seen any more if at all.

Let us go to the book of Daniel and we will see a bit of this prophesized in Daniel 2:

Daniel 2:31-34 "You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces."

Daniel 2:44-45 "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the

kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure."

Daniel was a major sixth century ^{BC} prophet. In fact, he was the one that ended the string that began long before Amos who came along probably in the 760s ^{BC}. But the major prophet during that period of time—this Axial period—was Jeremiah. (But we are looking at Daniel for the moment.) God used Daniel to complete the picture of that axial period in very broad strokes; it is something of very great interest to us. There is not one of us within the hearing of my voice that would not recognize the image—the gold, the silver, the bronze, the iron, and the clay. We know what it means. What God is forecasting through his prophets is the rise of these nations, and that rise began during that sixth century ^{BC} axial period.

But did you notice something? God used Daniel to prophesy that another axial period is coming! Not much detail is given, but it is there nonetheless. It is the one that talks about the stone that smashes the beast (the image) on the feet, and then grows to become a great nation.

Now, it is during this axial period that the great events that we are looking forward to are going to take place. And when that axial period is over, the great nations of the earth are going to go through another very dramatic shift, and the Kingdom of God is going to reign supreme over all of them. God even tells us through Isaiah who the great nations are going to be. It is going to be Israel, Assyria, and of all things, Egypt, which seems strange to us, but God is going to raise those people up, and they are going to become a great nation as part of the three.

The Bible says that God will do nothing except He reveals His secrets to His servants, the prophets. The former axial period prophets are also, in many cases, the latter axial period prophets as well. Jeremiah played a very large

part in the first one. So did Isaiah, Daniel, and some of the minor prophets. The major prophets of the end time axial period are Jesus Christ, Daniel, Ezekiel, John the apostle, and some of the minor prophets.

One of the more interesting things about these prophecies is going to be the subject for the body of this sermon, and that is, God not only predicts the events that are going to occur to the nations of the earth, but He also tells us a very great deal about what people's attitudes are going to be like, and how they are going to react to the awesome events that we are going to be witnessing together.

Have you ever considered your attitude toward what God has prophesied about what we are now beginning to experience? Toward what we know at least in a general way from what prophecy tells us is going to occur? Your attitude about the coming of Jesus Christ and what is going to occur after that? If you thought maybe it was unimportant to God, then I think you need to reconsider, because it may have very great bearing on what happens to you during these upcoming years.

We are going to begin in one of the Minor Prophets. It is the book of Amos.

Amos 5:18-20 Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! For what good is the day of the LORD to you? [Did you see that?] Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! [Do you not want to see Jesus Christ return?] It will be darkness, and not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him! Or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him! Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?

You know as far as we have gone so far, Amos is undoubtedly repeating back to these people some of the things that have either been said directly to him, or some of the things that he heard about the attitude of these people. The day of the Lord that he is specifically talking about eventually came true. It became a fact of history when Assyria came on this land. This was probably about 40 years before it actually occurred. Yet these people were looking forward to the day of the Lord. In their case, looking forward to it was not a good thing at all.

What we need to consider here is that a person's perspective on an event is exceedingly important to God. It is exceedingly important to what that perspective does to our life—to our conduct. It is because of this perspective issue that God's law required two or three witnesses before a conviction could be reached. Do you know why? The principle is quite simple. It is not too frequently that two people see an event in exactly the same way. Even a person's angle of actually looking at the event may alter or cause his judgment to be different from somebody else who saw exactly the same event but saw it from a different angle. One was looking at it from the north, while the other was looking at it from the east. The perception that these people got of all of the others involved in that event was somewhat different. Things were emphasized in their mind that maybe the other person could not even see.

I have used this illustration before, but I think that it helps to understand. Suppose this occurred on a Sabbath day. And for some reason, you were on one of the streets of your town and you saw John Ritenbaugh coming out of a tavern on the Sabbath day. With just that information, looking at it from your perspective, it is very likely that a judgment is going to begin to form in your mind. But it gets worse, because John Ritenbaugh not only steps out of the tavern, but he takes a few steps on the sidewalk, stumbles, and falls flat on his face.

Ah ha! Here it is the Sabbath (let us say it is in the morning). John Ritenbaugh is in a tavern drinking it up, and he is so sloshed that when he comes out of there, he staggers and falls flat on his face. And here it is the Sabbath day. I have broken the Sabbath, and I have gotten sloshed. What a juicy piece of gossip you have from your perspective!

But the real truth of the matter was that a prospective member who wanted to be a part of us was looking into the Church of the Great God. They had called and said, "Well, this is the only opportunity that I have right now. I am in town, and I don't know really where to meet you, but I do know that there is a tavern down here, and if we could meet there, I would really like to do it."

And so John Ritenbaugh went down there, and sat in the tavern with that person, and had a cup of coffee, and we talked for an hour. And when I came out it was a bright, sunshiny day. I was blinded by the sun. When I took a step, there was a crack or something in the sidewalk, and I tripped, and fell flat on my face. And so here I was, innocently doing my job.

You see? Your perspective of it included gaps of essential knowledge to reach the right conclusion. That principle may very well be at work in what is reported here in Amos 5.

God warns these people that they have the wrong attitude in them, because their perception of the day of the Lord is wrong. To them, the day of the Lord was going to be a day of vindication, a day of awesome victory for Israel, and the establishment of it as the great of the nations, and of course, for them as well. All others who came against Israel would be judged, and they would be found wanting. But what they did not think of was that it was going to be a day of judgment for them too, and Amos is warning them that their works were not going to stand before the penetrating scrutiny of God. They were going to go down the tubes into defeat, into ignominy, and into captivity, unless they repented.

It is very likely from what we understand of the chronology of the book of Amos that this was roughly 40 years before Assyria came upon Israel. Just earlier in chapter 4, it says,

Amos 4:12 "Therefore thus will I do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!"

God made it very clear through Amos even previous to this, that they had better repent. And so now we can begin to understand because this throws light on their actual attitude. Their desire for the day of the Lord was actually proud, careless, ignorant, scoffing, and mocking. Their perception was entirely wrong. And perhaps the fountain that spewed forth all these other things was their proud attitude that they were alright, that everything was just fine. It was going to be the other guy who was going to be judged.

Let us learn from this as we go along. We are going to turn to II Peter 3.

II Peter 3:1 Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), . . .

That is what we are doing here. We are remembering the way the people were in the book of Amos just before Israel fell.

II Peter 3:2-3 . . . that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior, knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, . . .

The people in the book of Amos were doing that.

II Peter 3:4-5 . . . and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." For this they willfully forget.
..

Do you think that those people in Amos' day were not willingly ignorant? I do not think that God would have inspired Amos to say the things he did if they were not willingly ignorant. We just read one chapter before that he warned them to repent, and he warned them to prepare to meet their God. These people were willingly ignorant of what had previously been said to them.

I think what Peter is writing about here is not specifically the church, but about the world in general. The world in general is willingly ignorant. We do not want to be willingly ignorant. Even though this accusation is made against the world, it is put in here so that we can learn from it.

II Peter 3:5 For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water. . .

What he means is that God keeps His word. Just because it has not happened, does not mean it is not going to happen. In fact, it could happen while we are alive.

II Peter 3:8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

God has a different perspective on time than we do. For Him it is never too late, never too early. He is right on time with everything. But, with our impatient nature, as well as with our ignorance of many things (and I do not mean that in a bad way), we just do not know, we do not understand, we do not see everything that is going on. We are not aware of all of the machinations of both men and God. And so, what happens is we are ignorant of some things. This can be overcome by the right attitude. But these people are willingly ignorant.

Now, this is not unusual, but it is not the only attitude that people have had toward God's prophets and the prophecies. We find that very many of them had to face crowds of people who are not in tune with them at all.

We are going to go back to Isaiah 5.

Isaiah 5:18-19 Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as if with a cart rope; that say [this is what is interesting], "Let Him make speed and hasten His work [aimed at God], that we may see it."

Does that sound like Amos? "Hey, let's have the day of the Lord. That's going to be a great time; a good time. We are going to see Israel vindicated. We are going to be on top. Oh, God is prophesying through you, Isaiah. He's saying that all these things are going to happen. Let's see it!"

Isaiah 5:19 "and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come, that we may know it."

I will tell you, if that is not a mocking attitude. I would like to know what one is!

From here, let us go to Jeremiah because what those people were doing was challenging God. What is unsaid is, "Yeah, we're ready for it. We can take what's going to be dished out because God, you're going to save us! We are Israel. We've made the covenant with you."

Do you know what happened in Jeremiah 7? Jeremiah accused the people of saying, "The temple, the temple, the temple of the Lord is here!" Do you understand? The people were saying, "We're alright because the temple is here."

The modern equivalent, the church equivalent of that is, "We're okay because we're in the church!" The temple of the Lord today is the body of Christ.

In Jeremiah 17, just shortly after the statement, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" We see:

Jeremiah 17:15 Indeed they [the Jews] say to me [Jeremiah is complaining to God], "Where is the word of the LORD? Let it come now!"

It almost seems as though these carnal people are anxious for God's Word to come to pass, even when He is prophesying destruction. And yet God in His mercy does not let it come fast because He wants more people to have the opportunity to repent. At least that is one of the reasons why He does not bring it quickly.

Ezekiel 12:22 "Son of man, what is this proverb that you people have about the land of Israel, which says, 'The days are prolonged, and every vision fails?'"

Israel had so frequently been impatient about the prophecies of God being fulfilled that they had reached the point they were scoffing about it; mocking

it had become a proverb in the land, "Oh, God said it. God said it through His prophet? The prophet said it, ha ha ha ha ha! Oh boy! How about that?" Then in verse 27:

Ezekiel 12:27 "Son of man, look, the house of Israel is saying, 'The vision that he sees is for many days from now, and he prophesies of times far off.'"

Let us update that for a little bit. I think what Mr. Armstrong showed us very clearly is that by the time Ezekiel prophesized, Israel had already been in captivity over 100 years. This prophecy is for us today. It could not possibly be a warning to Israel. It could have been a warning to Judah at least to some extent. But, even when Ezekiel made these prophecies, he was already a captive in Babylon with the Jews in a prison camp by the River Chebar.

And not only had Israel gone into captivity, but Judah also had gone into captivity. And so even if a person wants to say, "Well Israel, here, means Judah," but it is already too late. And so, if we feed that back into verse 22, it is the people of Britain, Canada, the United States, South Africa, and Australia that are saying that the days are prolonged, and every vision fails. They are the ones in II Peter 3 who are saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?" You are living in those days. This thing is right on time.

What is your attitude? What is your attitude toward the coming of the Day of the Lord? I am sure that every prophet of God had to hear these mocking jibes from the people that they were trying to save. "Oh, let it come! Let those prophets prophesy until they are hoarse! Let it come! All God is doing (if this fellow is even a prophet of God) is he always threatens. He never really comes through with the punishment. It's just the threat!" They could even say, "But we don't believe it ever will come. But if it does come, it's not going to be as dreadful as this guy is saying."

You can be sure that they (I mean the people who heard these prophecies) very much knew what the times were that they were living in. When they heard them in their day, it was not all that good. Yes, they knew that their land was dangerous. It was filled with violence. They knew that there was a great disproportion in the distribution of wealth. And yet, they still longed for the fulfillment of the good times on the other side of the prophecies.

Amos in particular meets that hypocrisy by warning them that they had nothing in common with God, and that the day of the Lord was going to be for them a time of continuous terror, dread, anxiety, and fear. You meet the bear and escape from this and run into something else that is even worse until finally a rattlesnake or a viper kills you.

But God mercifully warned them to prepare to meet Him just as surely as He brought the Flood; just as surely as He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah; just as surely as He sent Israel into captivity. The judgment of His great day is coming and we had better not be indifferent about that. It is coming, and we had better understand that eternal life is not all that far off.

Let us go back to the New Testament to prophecies that are quite familiar within the book of Luke.

Luke 21:22 "For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled."

This is Luke's version of Jesus' Olivet prophecy. And that is quite a heading, "These [be] the days of vengeance." It is the time when God takes His vengeance. Verse 34 is advice to you and me.

Luke 21:34-36 "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly, for it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. 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."

Do you know what that word 'surfeiting' [*King James Version*, and 'weighed down' in the *New King James Version*] means? It has nothing to do with Hawaii or California and getting up on a board and riding a wave into the shore. It has to do with a person indulging his appetites to an excess. Appetites, here, does not mean just food. It simply means that whole range of desires that motivate us to seek fulfillment. And the basic instruction is not to let ourselves be distracted by something that is going to take us away,

to focus us, take our focus to a different direction away from what ought to be our main concern, which ought to be getting prepared for God and His return.

Now lest we have become careless, I want to take just a little bit of time to warn us that we may be putting the wrong emphasis on verse 36, and the words, "Watch therefore." When we read this (and I am using myself as an example), I think maybe that you are pretty much the same as I am, because we have heard this verse expounded so frequently, we read into it, "Watch world news" almost as though it is a part of the verse. We almost read it this way, "Watch world news and pray always."

I think it is certainly included within the broad framework of the proper understanding of that verse. However, the main message from the entirety of the chapter (feeding that into the main message, into the context), the main thrust of that word, "watch," is simply, "Be alert! Wide awake! On guard!"

You see, watching world news may assist one in doing that, but the thrust of the word is, "Be alert! Be wide awake." The passage even says that in verses 34 and 35, so that Day come upon you unawares, unexpectedly. If you are alert, it will not come on you unawares, and you will not get caught in the snare if you are alert.

Alert to what? Again, the context tells us that our heart be not overcharged with carousing and drunkenness, not necessarily alcohol, but that it may be included, but I think that it means more like, "Drunk with the wine of the wrath of her fornication." He is talking about worldliness, and the cares of this life. Jesus is saying, "Be alert to whether or not these things are going on in your life because if they are, the attitude is not right." That is the thing. The attitude toward the end is not right.

Why are attitudes so important? Why would God put so much about attitudes in the end time prophecies? An attitude is nothing more than a leaning. You hear it with the astronauts. They are asked every once in a while what their attitude is. They do not mean that the astronauts are angry or upset, or anything. They are talking about the spaceship. They want to know from headquarters, "How is it leaning?" Or they will report, "Our attitude is such and such."

An attitude in a human being is a mental inclination. If something is leaning in one direction, which way does it tend to want to go in? It will fall or move in the direction in which it leans. It is the same thing with mental attitudes; they motivate us to go in the direction of the attitudes.

If the attitude is such that it is focused on the cares of this world, on surfeiting, on this worldly drunkenness, that is the direction we are going to head in. And that makes overcoming, and it makes being prepared that much more difficult. And so, Jesus' concern is, "What is your attitude? Are you alert to what is going on in you?"

If you are really alert, you will watch world news, but it will not occupy so much time that you are consumed with it. You know what happens? You can be so consumed with looking at the news that your life—your spiritual life, your relationship with God, your relationship with others—can actually go to pot. And in that case, you see the focus would be on something that is, well, in its right measure good, but [being] overdone. There would actually be an overcharging.

There is a reason why this is stuck in here, "Be alert." Those reasons are primarily listed and expounded upon in the book of Matthew. The reason is because (incredible as it might seem) the prophecies show that at the time of the end, the church is going to go to sleep. You, and me—us!

Look at it in Matthew 25:

Matthew 25:1 "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom."

You know the rest there. Let us go down to verses 5-6.

Matthew 25:5 "While the bridegroom was delayed, . . .

"Oh oh! Hey prophet! When are these prophecies going to be fulfilled? Bring it on, bring it on! I'm ready for the Day of the Lord! Let's have it right now!" Do you think the church, God's spiritual sons and daughters, cannot go to sleep just like they [Israel] did there in the book of Amos?

Matthew 25:5-6 “But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!'”

I think that this group (the Church of the Great God), and other groups (I do not mean us exclusively here, I am talking about the end time group, more specifically the end time group that had a great deal of contact with, or spun off from the Worldwide Church of God), I think that cry went forth, "Behold, the bridegroom comes," through Herbert Armstrong, and we were awakened, and we began to become alert to the times in which we live in. But that does not mean that we are all as awake as we should be, or could be, perhaps need to be. Whether we are really awake will tend to show in what we do with our lives.

Perhaps our greatest problem is not so much ignorance, but we have a problem with what to do with our time. See? That is what Luke 21:34-36 are concerned about there. What to do with our time? Well, you might say, "I don't have that problem, because I have more to do with my time than I possibly have time for." Well, you have got a problem there, do you not?

I think this is rather interesting. Do you know that God never accuses the Laodiceans of being lazy? They have an *attitude* problem. He does not say that they are lazy. He does not say that they are not busy. He does say that they are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. And what that indicates is lackadaisical, or indifferent about spiritual things.

And so you see, a person can be very busy with his life, but not consuming his time and energies on the right things, even such a thing that might be as right as watching world news, and all the while the spiritual life is actually degenerating within the church.

Now, I know whereof I speak, because that is right in this same parable, because part of that group that went to sleep did not have enough oil. Their lamps were going out, and all the while they were in the church, they were degenerating over a lot of that period of time, even though they were in on the know. And so we see in verse 8:

Matthew 25:8-9 “And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.'”

I think in this analogy that those who sell are the ministry, who are really preaching the Word of God, [trying to] get the Holy Spirit regenerated and fanned into a flame once again.

Matthew 25:10 “And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and [Notice!] those who were ready [What are we supposed to use our time for? Getting ready. Be alert! Pay attention to the right things.] went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.”

Just like the conclusion to the other one,

Matthew 25:13 "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.”

"Watch therefore" here has a stronger leaning toward "being ready, being prepared," than it does "stay awake," because of the context. So everybody, then, has to understand that there is only so much time. Jesus' concern for His church at the end time—apparently, God gave Him the perception to look forward into time, and to recognize that the times that we would be living in would be filled with busyness. There would be far more to do than we could possibly ever do, and that we were going to have a difficult time making choices and prioritizing the use of time in our lives, because there is so much that is attractive to the mind. Depending on what we focus on, it is going to depend upon how alert we are to God's prophecies, and where our faith is at that time.

Did you ever notice in a movie or in a novel, that when intruders are shown trying to break into some facility that they are almost invariably shown taking advantage of a guard or a watchman whose attention is less than it should be, either because he is drowsy, gone to sleep, or is distracted by something. And during that period of distraction, the intruders take their

opportunity to break into the facility. You see that watchman is neither alert nor prepared. I hope you get the point because this is what Jesus was thinking about.

Do you know why con men succeed? It is because those who are conned (you know, those who are taken in by the scam) are so intent, so absorbed on greedily making a killing, that they are not watchful, either of the character of the person who is conning them, or to the usually obvious deception of the scam. And so they are caught off guard.

Satan is the master con artist of all time. That is why God has so many warnings to His children regarding our attitude at this time. Satan has created a world with a multitude of attractive diversions. He has red herrings that he is throwing out there all the time for us to pursue endlessly; all kinds of cares designed to attract our attention and scam us into wasting oodles of time in some exciting vanity.

Taken within the context of these two parables, one gets a very clear picture that when we get down to the end time, to live without watchfulness is to invite disaster. We must watch because a thief does not send a letter informing you when he is going to burgle your home. And neither does the con artist tell you he is going to deceive you of your wealth. And so, their main tools are deceit and surprise.

If we are alert, we will neither be deceived, nor will we be taken by surprise. Therefore, if you know this principle, and have things of value that you want to protect, you are going to prod yourself to be alert in order to protect those things, are you not? Jesus also said that, too. That if the good man had known when the thief was coming, he would have been on guard. We do not know when Christ is coming. We do not know when Satan is going to make a pointed attack on one of us. We only know that God warns us to always be alert.

There is one more thing that we can learn from these parables: rejection is based on failure in duty, and that reward within the context of these parables, is based on steadfast faithfulness.

Let us go to I Thessalonians 5.

I Thessalonians 5:1-3 But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

That is a beautiful picture because a woman with child is very obviously going to have one, and she may be very near to the time of her delivery. But the exact moment that the birth pangs begin just cannot be prophesized. It is a beautiful illustration because we see in the world that the world is pregnant for the return of Christ, the events are all over the place. We see little pieces of it here and little pieces there. So we are not uninformed, but we still do not know exactly when the birth pangs will really begin.

I Thessalonians 5:4-6 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.

The Feast of Trumpets is a day of solemnity, a day of being sober. We can be joyous, but also what it tells us about the times in which we live, it is a time of sobriety, a time of turning, that if there is anything wrong in our lives, it is a good time to begin to make that turn.

I Thessalonians 5:7-9 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

God has provided us with more than enough instruction to keep us pointed in the right direction so that time does not come upon us as a surprise. You know, it is also interesting that even though God sent warnings of the Flood through Noah; of Sodom and Gomorrah through Lot; of the captivity of Israel through a multitude of prophets—yet those events appeared suddenly

and took those people by surprise. I do not think they had the right attitude toward the prophet or the prophecies, or it would not have taken them by surprise and they would have done something

Jesus, during His ministry, spoke as though the Jews should have known who and what He was. He did that because they had the prophecies. They should have known that Daniel 9 and the 70 weeks prophecy was just about ready to be fulfilled. They could count. They probably knew the dates better than we do. In fact, there were some who were looking; they knew that it was just about time, even as we know that it is just about time for His second coming. They knew that it was about time for the Messiah to come.

But did they respond to Him? They did not. He accused them. He said, "You know when it is going to rain, you can forecast the weather." But He said, "You do not even know the times that you are living in." They ignored the signs that God gave.

We have been amply instructed and so Paul warns us that we should not allow ourselves to go to sleep, but to watch and to be sober. We will recognize the signs because of our instruction. But God still worries that the pressures of this world will distract us and lull us into inattention. I will tell you, we really have a very loving God.

Through Paul, God can warn us, tell us to be sober, to be alert, and to be self-controlled. He can warn us not to be spiritually drunk. He can warn us to be prepared like a soldier going into battle. That is about the breastplate of faith and so forth. Paul understood a great deal about what the times were going to be like. And it is going to be a time when Satan is going to turn his heaviest spiritual guns against us. But if we are clad the way Paul described, like a soldier with adrenaline surging through his body as he goes into battle, we will be ready because that adrenaline will focus our attention in the right direction.

Turn to Ezekiel 33. This is a chapter that we have gone through very frequently, because it involves the watchman.

Ezekiel 33:30 "As for you, son of man, the children of your people are talking about you beside the walls and in the doors of the

houses; and they speak to one another, everyone saying to his brother, 'Please come and hear what the word is that comes from the LORD.'

We cannot help but wonder whether it was mocking, scoffing, whining, or something else, but whatever it was it was not pleasing to God. And so, God says to Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 33:31-33 "So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them. And when this comes to pass—surely it will come—then they will know that a prophet has been among them."

Would it not be tragic if some of those into whose ears the trumpets are blown are those who did not take heed?

When Christ finally returns, the Bible shows there are going to be two radically different attitudes in those watching and living through the horrific events of this life. II Timothy 4 is the first of these two. This is where Paul says that he is ready to be offered and the time of his departure is at hand. He says:

II Timothy 4:7-8 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

There will be those who long for His appearing in the right way. They may be in their graves. And if they are, they will have longed for His appearing or His return when they were alive. And they will have expressed that longing by the way that they have lived. The result of this is that they are going to receive a crown of righteousness. That is how we can understand that when they did long for God to come, they did something with their lives. That is

the way they demonstrated to God that their attitude toward the return of Jesus Christ was right on the beam.

The people in Amos did not do that. They did not turn; they did not repent; they did not change. They looked at the day of the Lord as a day of vindication for the nation, though it could not even come close to the standard of God. When God was appealing to them through Amos to repent, they did not repent.

But these people who love His appearing, they are going to receive a crown of righteousness, which is proof that they were righteous when they died and that their love of Christ's return was right on. The implication is that the crown matched the way that they lived. They lived righteously. They were victorious. They overcame.

There is a beautiful thing here, and that is that this crown (unlike the awards that are given in men's contests where only one can win) in God's way, regardless of who it is, if they get to this point described in verse 8, they win! They are victorious, not over others, but over the course that they personally have had to negotiate.

In the lottery one obtains the highest prize—one! In a college class, there is only one person who has the highest rank. In a running race, only one finishes first regardless of how many are in the race and how well the other runners have done against their previous best. There is hardly an illustration that pictures the difference between God's way and man's way. In man's way, one wins, everybody else loses! No matter how skillfully they have done, the losers must suffer the mortification of failure.

Not so with God! The only one that we are really running against is ourselves. Each and every person has similarities in his course, but each person is judged on his own merits. It is no wonder, brethren, that they love His appearance. They won! And when you win, that brings joy.

The Day of Trumpets is a day of joy, shouting, and with trumpets! No wonder it is so happy. Everybody who is going to be there that day wins! Do you not love the appearance of a benefactor? Well, certainly, and that is what is involved here.

One of the interesting aspects of this verse is that this phrase, "That love His appearing," can also be translated, "Have loved His appearing," in the past perfect tense, meaning that from the point of time of the context the loving took place, it was in the indefinite past. What that could mean is that they loved His first appearing, and they loved His second appearing.

There is nothing wrong with that! What it means in actual practical application is that these people had the righteousness of Christ imputed to them, and they maintained that righteousness and grew in holiness preparing for His second appearing. They did not let it degenerate. They watched. They were alert.

It is interesting that virtually every commentator I looked into regarding this verse mentioned the word 'prepared.' (I am talking about II Timothy 4:8.) These brethren used their lives to be prepared, and that is why they loved His appearing. They were prepared for it.

Let us turn to Revelation 1 and we will see the other category.

Revelation 1:7 Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.

It actually says in the Greek, "Amen, amen!" Let it be, let it be! It is actually in this case like a shout of joy that these people should wail over the return of Christ.

Unfortunately, this group includes the bulk of mankind. And we find in Revelation 11:15, 18 that when Christ returns at the sound of the seventh trumpet, the nations are angry, and they are going to fight against Him.

Revelation 1:7 expresses an attitude of sorrow mixed with fear. And so, this second group has two separate categories. There are those who wail, and there are those who are angry. One greets His return with dread and fear, and the other greets His return with anger and fights Him.

Both of these are very clearly contrasted with those who love His appearing. Why should people be in sorrow and fear? Well, it is on account of Him coming! His coming will be an occasion of grief because it will bring to remembrance sin. It will bring to remembrance the knowledge that they did not believe strongly enough to do anything about it and submit to God. And now they are in anguish because they lost an opportunity.

What do you think is going to be on their minds? There is dread because the judgment is coming and they know they are either going to go through something that is exceedingly terrifying, or painful, because they know it is coming. It is sort of like the guy in Luke 16 whose tongue was sticking to the roof of his mouth. And I of course, do not mean that these people are going into the Lake of Fire, but that they have intense feelings of guilt, because if they were innocent there would be nothing to be sorrowful for, nothing to fear. They are in dread of punishment for sin.

To them the return of Christ is not as a Benefactor. He returns as one who is going to give them a very bad spanking. It is coming, and the people are going to be this way, and that is why the double expression of certainty is given there. Assuredly, He *is* coming!

The point of this is, of course, that we have an awesome and wonderful opportunity. God includes the instruction regarding the attitudes of the time of the end because we have power over these things. Even as I described earlier, an attitude is an inclination to conduct our lives in a certain way. And so an attitude motivates.

But do you know? Conduct also motivates. The two work for each other. If the conduct is right, it tends to move the attitude in the right direction. If the attitude is right, it tends to move the conduct in the right direction. So let us say that your attitude is not all that good. If you begin to do the right thing—along with your prayer to God; your appeals to Him to grant repentance and forgiveness—even though you really do not feel like doing it, if you begin to make yourself do the right thing, it is going to assist greatly in moving the attitude in the right direction.

The attitude works the same way as well: If we allow the attitude to have its way, it begins to make the effort toward the right conduct.

They say that the road to hell is paved with good intentions, but [really] they are good intentions that never get followed through upon.

So we can make a change. This is the time of turning. It is a time to begin as we move into this fall holy day season. Examine yourselves and see if there is not anything that God has prophesied involving the end time that we need to get straightened out.

The time is now, and it can be done with an appeal to God, and a willingness to sacrifice ourselves, we will begin to see that attitude or the conduct begin to change.