

## Uniqueness And Time

### We Are Involved in a Process

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 08-Jun-03; Sermon #616B

A number of years ago, it was all the rage among a large number of people worldwide to do any manner of outrageous things to have their names entered into the *Guinness Book of World Record*. Their object in doing this was not only just personal accomplishment, but also it was to be unique. This was the only guy, the only gal, the only group that ever did this particular thing.

They wanted to stand out. They wanted to be separate from everybody else, whether as an individual or a group. They wanted to have some renown. Maybe it was to buck up their own pride, or maybe it was to build some pride, but they wanted to do something much better, much bigger, longer, higher, faster, farther, or slower maybe than anybody else had ever done.

The word "unique" is an adjective that means, "of which there is only one, unequaled, having no like, equal or parallel." Depending upon the context, it is synonymous with single, alone, only, solitary, one of a kind, distinctive, peerless, unmatched, incomparable, surpassing, or exceptional.

In 1974, three events that fit into this theme of uniqueness had a significant impact on me, and they also fit into one of the themes of the meaning of this day. Two of them were movies. One was seen at Ambassador Auditorium, the other was on television. The one at Ambassador Auditorium concerned the Pygmies in Africa, and the Pygmies are certainly unique. In all of the world, there is nobody that is quite like them.

The other was a documentary about the natives of New Guinea. They are a unique people as well. The Pygmy movie showed me a people who made fairly good use of their environment. They were actually far more moral than I expected them to be, but at the same time their sanitation was at a level that was almost non-existent. Their diet was appalling, consisting of even such things as giant cockroaches. But they were a peaceful people, and tribal warfare occupied very little of their time. But nonetheless, and probably because of the sanitation and the poor diet, their life spans were quite short compared to ours as the ravages of disease took its toll.

The other movie about the natives of New Guinea showed a people who were degenerate, even by Pygmy standards. One scene that really stuck in my mind was of a group of them eating wild pig that was almost to the point of being raw. Cannibalism was still a practice among those people to some degree, and their homes most likely were nothing more than a crude hole that was carved out of a hillside.

By comparison to the Pygmies, who made fairly good use of their environment, the New Guinea natives developed almost nothing. They had very short life spans, and preparation with warfare with the neighboring tribe, and then the warfare itself, seemed to occupy virtually their whole life.

The third event that happened there in 1974 was an article that appeared in the now defunct *National Observer*, which was a publication of the Dow-Jones, and it was in regard to the highly achieving astronauts who were involved in the space program. This was a unique group of astronauts. In contrast to the Pygmies and the New Guinea natives, they represented what seemed to be the very epitome of human development. The article was titled, "What do you do after you've gone to the

moon?" What more is there that anybody could think of accomplishing? Boy! What a contrast it presented with the Pygmies and the New Guineans.

The article specifically dealt with the psychological developments in the lives of the men who participated in those spacecraft that had actually gone to the moon, landed on it, or flew by it. In the article Neil Armstrong was described as enigmatic, unemotional, and withdrawn. Buzz Aldrin (the second man on the moon) had an emotional breakdown. Al Bean was father to a withdrawn son. Pete Conrad is said to have developed radical right-wing views.

Edgar Mitchell and John Young both had divorces. James Irwin found God, was involved in family problems, went looking for Noah's ark, and died an early death before reaching fifty. Jack Schmitt (the last of the bunch) was involved in psychological experiments dealing with mental telepathy, sending thoughts from the moon to somebody else's mind way out there somewhere, or maybe on earth. By the way, it didn't work.

Each of these three groups is unique from all others on earth in some way: the Pygmies, because of their extreme shortness of height and yet fairly successful in the use of their rugged environment; the New Guinea natives for their wild lifestyle and almost non-existent cultural development. The question is this: Were those highly technically advanced astronauts from our Western culture (who are in at least one way unique from all others in that they had trained for and actually traveled to the moon) really any better off than the Pygmy of Central Africa, or the New Guinea native?

These thoughts came forcefully to mind after giving what to me was a very encouraging Bible Study, and then the sermon. We looked at all the titles that are given in the Bible by God to those who participate in His purpose. I named 14 or 15. We explored them. There are many more than the ones that I gave, but just as a little refresher, we are *the called, the redeemed, the sons of God*. We are *sanctified*. We are *treasure, beloved, peculiar*, and we are *firstfruits*.

On the one hand, two of these three groups were occupied (almost their entire short lives) with merely surviving from day to day. It clearly took a toll that is evidence by their very short life span. In addition, their lives were almost totally focused on what was immediately in front of them—getting food and surviving that day. Their lives had no long-range direction toward a great goal.

The astronauts didn't have much of a day-to-day concern for survival, but the point of the article was that their lives were psychologically scarred by the intense pressure of succeeding in the environment of high-scientific achievement. Their survival trials had little or nothing to do with daily food necessity, but surviving the academic pressures and the possible scorn that they might experience because of feeling that they might be perceived as occupational failures by their peers in the National Aeronautical Administration, impacted on their lives. But they did have a great long-range goal in life.

I think that we can quickly agree that the astronauts are unique. They are the only ones who have ever left the earth, gone to the moon, looked back at the earth from that location, and then returned to tell others about it. That's an unusual uniqueness that separates them from all other men who have ever lived since Adam and Eve. But do you know what? Everybody on earth is physically unique from everybody else on earth.

Everybody knows, that like snowflakes falling from the sky, every person's fingerprints are unique to one individual of the six billion who live on earth. But that's not all that is unique about each person.

So are your eyes different from any body else's on earth. Your voice is different from everybody else's on earth, and they have even discovered now that everybody *walks* differently from everybody else, and they are thinking of using this to identify you. Uncle is looking.

The differences are much more widespread than that, because everybody's DNA is different from everybody else's. In fact, it is different from anybody who has ever lived. There has never been anybody exactly like you. Everybody on earth has some measure of uniqueness.

Two of those titles that I mentioned just a little bit earlier touch on the understanding of this day and our spiritual uniqueness. This is something that we should be aware of and take pleasure in, and allow it to motivate us, because we are so blessed.

**Titus 2:14** Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

I said that there were two of those titles that applied to this day, and there is one of them: *peculiar* . We're going to look also at I Peter 2:9.

**I Peter 2:9** But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a *peculiar* people; that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

The word "peculiar" is not being used here in the sense of odd. That is not God's intention. He is not saying that we are weird. The world might think of us in that manner, but that is not God's intention here. Rather He is using it in the sense of "distinctive" in a special *good* way.

A person may be distinctive because he is nine feet tall and has purple hair. But on the other hand a person might be exceptionally beautiful, handsome, or maybe it's because the person has an accent to his speech. Perhaps their distinctiveness lies in an artistic, athletic, or mathematical ability. Maybe they have a photographic memory, or maybe even a debilitating affliction. None of these distinctions matter as to why *we* are peculiar.

In Titus 2:14 Paul used the adjective form of that Greek word that is translated into the English "peculiar." In I Peter 2:9 he used the noun form of that same word. In Ephesians 1:14 he again used the noun form of that word. I want you to turn there because I want you to see what it is translated to by the King James translators in this verse. Very interesting.

**Ephesians 1:14** Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession unto the praise of his glory.

You didn't hear the word "peculiar" at all, did you? That's because it doesn't appear there, but the Greek word *does* appear there, and it is translated "possession." That translation actually comes closest to the literal meaning of that Greek word. The literal meaning of that Greek word translated "peculiar" in those other places is an acquisition, an obtaining, a possession. In I Peter 2:9, modern translators have replaced that phrase in which the word peculiar appears, with an expanded version, translated now "His own *special* possession." That is a good translation.

The word "special" brings us close to being somewhat synonymous with "unique." The English word "special" means "surpassing what is common or unusual; exceptional; distinct among others of a

kind." We have been made unique, separate from others, peculiar, distinctive, and special from God's point of view because *He* has obtained or acquired, or purchased us with the blood of Jesus Christ. It is *who* has purchased us, the *price* that was paid for us, and *why* we were purchased, that motivated the translators to insert the word "special." "Special" carries with it the sense of uniqueness.

But why has God gone to this trouble and expense—an expense that has cost Him the most precious of all prices? That phrase in Ephesians 1:14 states *why* succinctly. It says, "Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." That praise—"unto the *praise* of His glory"—is why He paid the price.

I'm going to read I Peter 2:9 again:

**I Peter 2:9** But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

Well, Peter agrees *exactly* with Paul that we have been called in order to show forth the praises of Him.

We're going to look at Philippians 1:9-11, back to Paul again.

**Philippians 1:9-11** And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment: That you may approve things that are excellent; that you may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ *unto the glory and praise of God*.

Now back to Titus 2:14 again, and we will see a little bit more specific rendering of why He has purchased us.

**Titus 2:14** Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people [a special possession], zealous of good works.

That verse shows us *why* or *how* we are going to produce the praises of God. It is by being zealous of producing good works.

The *New Testament Commentary* states: "This phrase—'His own possession,' or 'a people His very own'—appears so often in scripture in somewhat different forms that it ought to be considered as part of the Bible's *technical* phraseology."

It is clearly a point that God wants to impress upon us through sheer repetition, seeing it over and over again, as to *why* we are the called, *why* we are the chosen, and *why* and what it is that makes us peculiar, unique. We then are unique because of who it is that owns us, because of the price He had to pay to redeem us from our former owner, and that we "the purchased possession" are to glorify Him.

That last part—"glorify Him"—has an intriguing twist to it.

**Ephesians 1:13-14** In whom you also trusted, after that you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation in whom also after that you believed, you were sealed with that

holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

Verse 13 mentions that we were sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise *after* that we believed. Receiving the Holy Spirit is clearly something then that is in our past, is it not? We received it upon faith, repentance, being baptized, and having hands laid on us. Verse 14 then clarifies further that this was in the past by telling us that what we received was merely an *earnest*—an installment—guaranteeing that more will be given.

We're going to go back to Romans 8:32 where I spent almost a whole sermon on about a month ago, because it is so important to our salvation.

**Romans 8:32** He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

What we read in Ephesians 1:14 and what we just read in Romans 8:32 is in the same basic sense when Paul wrote them. Paul is saying here in Romans 8:32 that the payment of Jesus Christ was so great that everything else that God might be required to give us in order to bring us into His kingdom, in order to enable us to witness and glorify Him, that it is the *guarantee* that He will give us whatever it is we need. Nothing can exceed what He has already done. Therefore, what He has done in the past is the guarantee that we're going to receive whatever we need, because it's easy after that. I mean easy for Him; maybe not so easy for us.

In the same manner, the giving of God's Holy Spirit to enable us to keep His commandments, to enable us to glorify Him, to overcome and grow, that little bit He gave us is the guarantee that He will continue to give us all we need of that Spirit down the road and on into the kingdom of God.

Go back again to Ephesians 1:14, because a little 5-letter word there is very interesting.

**Ephesians 1:14** Which is the earnest of our inheritance *until* the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

That five-letter word is quite interesting as it applies to the rest of this sermon, because that word "until" further clarifies the time elements that are involved in what Paul is talking about here. He is stating the guarantee we have received—that little down payment—will last until the redemption of the purchased possession (you and me) unto the praise, the honor, the glory of God.

I don't know whether you caught it, so I'm going to tell you. I bet you think you've been redeemed already. That verse says that our redemption is in the future. That verse says, " *until* the redemption." How about those apples?

Before we get too deep here into letting this thing puzzle us, I want you to understand that we *have* been redeemed, but we are not *completely* redeemed— *not yet* . Just as Richard was teaching yesterday that transformation to glory is a process, well also *redemption* is a process. Transformation into glory has a beginning and an end. We are somewhere between the two.

Redemption also has a beginning and an end, and we are somewhere in between; but we have been promised, we have been given guarantees by God that even as He supplied things at the beginning, He will continue to supply things all the way through till the end when everything then will be tied

up in a neat little knot, and we will be in God's kingdom *fully* redeemed, *fully* sanctified, *fully* glorified, and every other part of the process will have reached its peak. It all began when we believed and accepted Jesus Christ, but it will not end until we receive God's Holy Spirit in *full* measure, and are *resurrected* into the kingdom of God, and glorified.

We know that we do not have God's Holy Spirit in full measure, but now we also know that we are not fully redeemed, and that we are of course not fully transformed yet either.

As it is used in the Bible, the term "redeemed" means "to deliver one by means of paying a price." That price has been paid, and we are even now the recipients of only the beginning of its blessings. And even now it places us under obligation to glorify God and to show forth His praises as we are able.

**II Corinthians 3:17-18** Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

We are *being* transformed. Transformation is a process. Redemption is a process. We should be able to more fully understand this from our own experience since being converted. We know, and we know that we know, that we are not completely free yet from Satan and from this world.

Let's go to I Corinthians 13:12 to touch on this just ever so briefly, because I want to give you places where it shows that the apostles are saying this right along, that we may not have picked it up with this understanding.

**I Corinthians 13:12** For *now* [right now] we see through a glass darkly; but *then* ...

There is a difference between the word "now" and the word "then." "Now" is right now; "then" is off in the future. Right now we look through a glass darkly. In other words, we don't see spiritual things anywhere near as clearly as we would like too maybe; but *then* —after the process is complete— we're going to be seeing them as the way they are. So something will happen during that period of time. There is a contrast: "now" and "then."

Human nature and this world have their grip on us, and we have to fight them, hold them off, or we know that we will conform to them. But gradually, bit by bit, as we learn and overcome, the veil that is talked about in this II Corinthians 3 chapter, is removed. But the time is coming when there is going to be full disclosure of all of these things.

Let's go back to another familiar place in Romans 7:22. In Romans 7, the Apostle Paul is talking about himself.

**Romans 7:22** For I delight in the law of God after the inward man, ...

He's talking about the way he looks, wants to honor, desires to keep, delights in God's law, ...but now a contrast.

**Romans 7:23** But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

Tell me something: Don't you think of the Apostle Paul as being one of the greatest Christians who ever walked on the face of this earth? And yet he is here saying that he carries around with him human nature, that wherever he goes that mind is there, and that mind, that human nature, brings him into captivity every once in a while. He's not entirely free, is he? Most assuredly he is not, and so he, like us, is brought into captivity to the law of sin and death which is in his members, and so he says:

**Romans 7:24** O wretched man that I am! Who shall *deliver* me from the body of this death?

Here's another one right there! *Deliver!* If he needs to be delivered, he's not free. He's still in captivity. There are clues like this all through these men's writings, showing that they struggled with the same things we do, and they yearned to have the fullness of God's spirit, to be *fully* redeemed, to be *fully* sanctified, to be *fully* converted; and they were not. So Paul stated that the law of sin and death brought him into captivity, and a person who is in captivity is not free, and he knows that he is still in captivity to at least some measure.

The sense of this I think is probably most clearly seen by us in the children of Israel in the wilderness. They were physically free from Egypt, were they not? They walked out. They walked through the Red Sea, which was a type of their baptism, and they were free men. Oh no they weren't! They were outside the borders of Egypt, and that put them in the same position symbolically as we are after we're baptized. We are free, but only incrementally free.

The fact that they weren't really free was proved by how they behaved, how they conducted themselves in that forty years they went through the wilderness. Everywhere they went, they took the habits of their former environment, their former life in Egypt, with them. They were not really free men, and so they kept wanting to go back to Egypt.

They were redeemed, but they were not completely redeemed. You see, symbolically in the picture, they were not really redeemed until they went over the Jordan River and went into the land and received their inheritance. Then, symbolically, they were free.

For you and me, the same thing is being enacted out. In reality, spiritually we are in the wilderness. We are pilgrims, and we are pulled by our mind just like the Apostle Paul was talking about here, and occasionally are brought into captivity to the law of sin and death. Then we cry out to God, "O wretched man that I am! Who's going to free me from this?" It's still future, and we won't be free until we are in God's kingdom, glorified, and fully redeemed.

Let's look at some more scriptures that were touched on. I Corinthians 6 will reinforce that, despite what we are working against, nonetheless we bear this responsibility.

**I Corinthians 6:19-20** What? Know you not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have of God, and you are not your own? For you are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

We are back to that thought of glorifying God.

**Romans 14:8** For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

We're going to go back to Isaiah 43 and see some of this responsibility in an Old Testament setting.

**Isaiah 43:20-21** The beast of the field shall honor me, the dragons and the owls: because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen. This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise.

In this context the people that God is forming is yet future. That is because what I just read is in the midst of a prophecy of Israel being re-gathered after the Tribulation, but the principle is the same. Whatever God does, He does for **His glory**. From the very beginning, everything has been done for **His** glory. This is something we understand intellectually, but to perform it is a great deal more difficult.

We are in a survival mode to some extent just like the Pygmies, and just like the people in New Guinea, and in one sense just like the astronauts, that what is directly in front of us gets in the way and blinds the real purpose of our life. We are so easily drawn to the immediate rather than to the long range of what our lives are to consist of since the time that God began His calling of us and bringing us to this place as His purchased possession.

In Isaiah 43, what He is talking about is yet in the future—the re-gathering of Israel and the raising up of them for His glory. But right now **we** (the church) are the special possession that He is forming into a nation.

We're going to look here at another interesting concept that plays into this, into today and into glorifying Him. We're going to go to the New Testament again, and we're going to look to the glorification of God.

**Romans 8:23** And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

Three concepts regarding this particular sermon appear there: (1) the Holy Spirit, (2) firstfruits, and (3) redemption. These all appear in verse 23. It's the word "firstfruits" that I'm interested in right here, because the way Paul uses *firstfruits* in this verse is in the same general sense as the word "earnest" he used in Ephesians 1:14. The word translated "firstfruits" in Romans 8:23 literally means "beginning." Does that give you the picture of a process? What Paul is indicating there is that a start has been made, and more will follow.

I think what God wants us to see this weekend is this sense of being involved in a process. Yes, there are difficulties for us, but we need to be reminded of the price that was paid for us. We need to be reminded of why we were called, and to be reminded that why we were called is to glorify God in the process He has begun. Eventually we will receive the fullness of everything that He has promised to us as individuals who are His children.

The word translated "earnest" in Ephesians 1:14 is used in reference to the spirit, and it means "a pledge." It's a security that more will follow. Again, remember I used this in reference to Romans 8:32. Those two words in those two verses there are being used in the same sense. The two words are virtually directly related, because what the receipt of the earnest of the spirit creates is what God calls "the **firstfruits**"—the beginning. He is implying a start, of more to come. The beginning is the pledge of more to come in a process.

The firstfruits—the beginning, since that Pentecost in 31 AD when God performed those marvelous works—are God's peculiar, or special possession, being purchased, worked on, being formed in order to glorify Him to the utmost. The firstfruits are *the Israel of God* —*the church of God*.

We're going to return in thought that the fullness of our redemption is yet future because I'm going to refer you to a scripture that is the clincher on this truth. Turn with me to Luke 21, to the discourse of the Olivet Prophecy that Jesus gave.

**Luke 21:28** And when these things begin to come to pass, [What things? All the evidences that we are living in the end-time.] then look up, and lift up your heads: for your redemption draws near.

There is nobody more authoritative than Jesus. Our redemption is yet in the future. Our *full* redemption is yet in the future. This is something that really ought to be obvious to us. Yes, we're free. We've been purchased. We've become special because of what God has done, and we are slowly growing, overcoming, maturing, becoming complete. We aren't there yet, but when the fullness comes, then we will be truly redeemed.

**Hebrews 6:1** Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection: not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God.

Do you see what Paul wrote there? "*Let us go on unto to perfection.*" He writes that from the standpoint to people who were not yet perfect, but they were moving in that direction. They weren't fully developed yet.

Let's look at another one in Ephesians 4:14. It's a little bit different wording here, but the same sense comes out.

**Ephesians 4:14-15** That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive: But speaking the truth in love, may *grow up* into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.

There the terminology is "growing up," and we all know that doesn't take place instantaneously overnight or whatever. It takes time. It is a process. That's what we're talking about here specifically in terms of redemption. We are in the midst of a process. Sanctification is a process. Conversion is a process. Growing and overcoming is a process. Glorification is a process. Redemption is a process. We go on to perfection—growing up, maturing, and becoming complete.

Becoming free of our captivity is not made in one giant leap. Liberty is produced one increment at a time. We indeed are the firstfruits. We are the beginning of God's great purpose, but we are most assuredly not a finished product. We're under construction. We are being transformed, brought to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

What is of immediate importance to us in this context of Luke 21, is that Jesus is alerting us and giving us a heads-up about the conditions that we are going to be facing, living in and through during our time of calling. He is calling upon us to take on a greater sense of urgency about our spiritual responsibility. "Time is running out," Jesus is saying here without saying it directly. Using those

words, He gives us all those evidences that we are living in the end-time, and then He says, "Your redemption draws near." He is saying "Time is running out, so heads up. Get looking."

**Luke 21:8** And he said, Take heed that you be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying I am Christ.

They're not denying that He's the Messiah—the Anointed One.

**Luke 21:8-11** And the time draws near: go you not therefore after them. But when you shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass: but the end is not by and by. Then said He unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And great earthquakes shall be in different places, and famines, and pestilences, and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven.

Is this not what we are living through right at this very moment in time? We are living in the only time in mankind's history since Jesus Christ, when we are able to be aware of the things that He is giving as evidence. He is describing conditions that are worldwide in their scope.

The people to whom He was talking in Luke 21 were limited to local occurrences, but Jesus is not talking about local occurrences, and so the implication from the manner in which Jesus said them, the church, His brethren, will be able to know almost instantaneously as these things are occurring. Until the telephone was invented, and then the radio, and then television, and then the computer, and perhaps most important of all the Internet, we would have had no way of knowing these things. It would have been impossible.

**Luke 21:13-19** And it shall turn to you for a testimony. Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what you shall answer: For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist. And you shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolk, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And you shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. But there shall not a hair of your head perish. In your patience possess you your souls.

This next set of conditions is what is on the docket for us. In most cases we're going to be removed from hearing of wars and rumors of wars. Earthquakes aren't going to touch us in most cases. Maybe if you live in California it will touch you, but it's not likely to do it here. We might get some hurricanes. We might get some tornadoes. Incidentally, there is a place in the book of Luke where it talks about waves and winds roaring, so those things are on the way.

But it is in verses 13 through 19 that it begins to get very personal, and we're beginning to see things occurring in the United States of America that give us thought about anticipating that these things may not be very far in the future. This Patriot Act, or the Homeland Security Act, is getting very interesting. A man called me not too long ago on the telephone and he said, "Is our government becoming fascist?" I said, "Yes. It's moving in that direction." I kid you not.

Things are being put into place that is making it possible for you to be thrown in jail with no recourse, or put into prison just because you're different. That's one of the reasons I went ever so

briefly over that little thing this morning about the University of North Carolina administration doing what they're doing on the campus. They're persecuting the Christian groups. Little things, incrementally, are happening.

Look what happened to David Koresh. We know that he wasn't a Christian, but they killed 80-some people without an apology. Forty of them were kids. Our government did that. There didn't seem to be a blink of guilt in what they did. They spun everything to make that group look like *they* were the evil ones. Things are happening. Are we becoming fascist? The answer is "yes." Will we get all the way there? Maybe it's a little way off, but it's moving in that direction.

Jesus is urging us to take action right now toward yielding to God because the times we live in are going to deceive large numbers of people, and they are deceiving because the conditions are going to happen in such a way as to make it look as though the conditions are not *really* all that bad.

Have you noticed the way they are spinning the Homeland Security Act, the Patriot Act, so that it's acceptable to people? It's not acceptable to everybody, but by and large the overwhelming bulk of the people are really unconcerned because they say they're doing it for our good, that it's for our security that it's being done.

**Luke 21:34** And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.

Do you see that? "So that day come upon *you* unawares." He's not speaking this to the world. The reason He's giving us this heads-up is that we can be deceived into thinking that it's not all that bad either. That's His concern.

**Luke 21:35** For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.

When a hunter uses a snare, he doesn't make it obvious, does he? He makes the trap as appealing and as innocuous as he possibly can so that the animal goes into it and not even know he's trapped. Only it's not an animal, it's us.

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

Let's go to Matthew's version of this in Matthew 24. Please remember this about the times that we live in. Despite all the evidence Jesus has given, they can be a snare, a trap.

**Matthew 24:39** But of that day and hour knows no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be: For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, And *knew not* until the flood came, and took them all away: so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

A snare is going to work to perfection. That's what He is saying. People are going to be so deceived by the times that we live in. The illustration of marrying and giving in marriage is simply given to

show that people are living life just as if nothing was wrong, that the times are normal. Now please don't forget this. He's not saying this to the world. He's saying it to *us*— His brothers and sisters.

Peter puts his own twist on it.

**II Peter 3:1-3** This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: 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 there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts.

Now we know the context here. It's the *end-time*. In addition to all this *evidence* Jesus gave, there are going to be people (scoffers) trying to convince you that it's not really the end-time.

**II Peter 3:4** And saying, Where is the promise of his coming?

I've been in the church since 1959. I have asked that question many times. "Well, where is He?" "Where is He? It's been going on 44 years here, and we've been waiting!" Our kids were never going to go to high school. Oh yes, they went to high school. They went to college. They graduated, and here they're having their own kids. We've got grandkids, and great-grandkids, and Christ still isn't here. It would be very easy to accept something like this. "Well, where is He?" It's no wonder He says, "In your patience possess you your souls."

**II Peter 3:4-8** 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 the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, *be not ignorant* of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

God doesn't count time exactly the same way we do. We get impatient very quickly.

**II Peter 3:9** The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

In other words, He's going to be working to save us right to the very end, and give us as much time as He can possibly spare.

**II Peter 3:10-12** But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night [He will come unexpectedly.]: in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons might you to be in all holy conduct and godliness. [This is how we glorify God.] Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

So Peter enters in the information that there are people who are *aware* of the times, but they are still so anti-God, so anti-Christ, they are willfully mocking and ridiculing those (us) who are fully aware, in an effort to discourage them.

We can't get away from Revelation 3:15.

**Revelation 3:15-19** I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot: I would you were cold or hot, so that because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue you out of my mouth. Because you say, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor and blind, and naked: I counsel you to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich: and white raiment, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness do not appear: and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore and repent.

The points of my sermon today are two: The first point is that like the Laodiceans, we cannot afford to allow ourselves to slip into the destructive thought that we are a finished product. See, "I am rich and increased with goods." "I'm finished." "Who needs perfection? I'm already there." They don't actually say it, but this is what they are saying by their conduct and by their attitude.

They *do* nothing to really grow. They *do* nothing to overcome, but they do have knowledge in their mind and they think they're okay simply because they have spiritual facts that they can draw upon to win arguments maybe. The conduct of the Laodicean actually reveals the deficiency in Christian discipline and character, and the result is that they are really what we call "Laodicean" in character.

The second point is that we cannot afford to be blind, ignorant, and careless about the times that we are living in by failing to take advantage of Jesus' warning and get urgent, because His return and the Tribulation are imminent.

In Matthew 25, right after the Olivet Prophecy, comes the parable of the Ten Virgins.

**Matthew 25:6-13** And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom comes: go you out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go you rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came: and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man comes.

The virgins of course represent those in the church, and the major point of this parable is not that the unwise virgins went to sleep, because the wise also went to sleep. Rather it is that the unwise virgins frittered away their time when they had the same opportunities as the wise. The result was the fruit of doing this is that they were severely blunted in their transformation, and their redemption is impossible. "I never knew you." They frittered away the fact that they were God's special purchased possession. They frittered away the fact that they had the earnest of the spirit. They frittered away their redemption and glorification.

We will finish in Ephesians 3:14-21. This is a prayer of Paul's for the Ephesian people, and for you and me.

**Ephesians 3:14-21** For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height: And to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fullness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

In Ephesians 5, God urges us through the Apostle Paul to "redeem the time, because the days are evil." God is in the business of exposing our sins to us, and this is good for us, and therefore He urges us to wake up (in Ephesians 5, in that same paragraph), because if we continue in sin, we are as good as dead. But it is His desire to save us, and that is why He exposes our sins to us.

We must do our part if we are going to experience the fullness of our redemption by taking advantage of the great gifts of His spirit, and using every opportunity that comes our way to confront our weaknesses and overcome them. He urges us not to lose what it is that has made us peculiar. Therefore, in Ephesians 5:14 He urges us to wisdom, by clearly understanding His *will* for us.

He wants us in His kingdom. That's His will. But He just doesn't want us in His kingdom, He wants us there experiencing life as He lives it, but some measure of responsibility for responding in submission falls upon our shoulders. We know what we must do to take advantage of our uniqueness. Time is running out. It's time to go do it.