

Focus

The Importance of Watching

John O. Reid (1930-2016)

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Years ago, I used to call on the bakery and doughnut shop trade. This was before chain restaurants came into existence. Since they would start early in the morning, I would get up early and go to the various bakeries and the doughnut shops and I would eat the trimmings of the sheet cakes, taste the cookies, sample the icing, and eat an occasional doughnut or two. I was younger then, and the added goodies did not stick to the ribs as easily as they do now. Somehow, over the years, one's waist becomes magnetized unless one is very careful. I enjoyed the job; I like people, and I enjoyed all of the customers.

I remember a poem in one of the doughnut shops that fits with the subject of the sermon today. It was written under a large picture of a sea captain of a square-rigger. His eyes were on the horizon in a storm, his hand on the ship's wheel, and next to his right hand was a doughnut stuck on one of the wheel's handles. Under the picture was the poem "As you go through life, make this your goal: Keep your eye on the doughnut and not on the hole."

The poet was telling all the customers to focus on the right goal and not on nothingness. I am not sure that he thought that deeply about it, but it caught my mind. Put another way: do not waste your time on things that do not take you where you wish to go in life. I am sure the poet did not mean that one could not relax and enjoy life at times and have a cup of coffee and a doughnut, but was stressing the need to not let down in keeping one's eye on where he was going and not being side tracked.

One would think that with the calling we have been given that we would all be pointed in the same direction. Yet, over the years, the simplicity we are called to seems to wane, and we start to focus on the hole in some form or another. I realize that the "hole" could be anything—job, pleasure, hobby, the pride of life, the lust of the flesh, or the lust of the eyes. However, today I would like us to consider something a little different, what God really wants from us.

In my almost forty years in the church, I have seen members leave over their understanding of prophecy not coming to pass. Many came to loggerheads with Mr. Armstrong, finally leaving when their brand of understanding of what was on the horizon was not accepted. Many have identified many different pairs of the two witnesses. Some supposed there were those that had long been dead that would be resurrected, even

though there is no example of that being done in the Bible. I have seen people so steeped in their "revealed" understanding of Scripture that they became consumed by it to the point that even the commandments came second place in their lives.

Shortly after the Church of the Great God started, I remember one member called me after having worked out what every minister was going to be doing. One was to be the minister of love; John Ritenbaugh, the minister of doctrine and teaching; still another, the minister of prophecy, etc. He talked on for about forty-five minutes, totally convinced that he had the inside track on what God was doing. When he hung up, I sat stunned at all the information that this man had. I was about to prepare a sermon or sermonette, and I just thought, "What can I speak on? This man knows everything!" He sounded so convincing that it took me about an hour to realize that he did not know what he was talking about.

I explained to him that his focus on prophecy would cause him to leave the church. About eight months later, he indeed did leave the church. His consuming focus was in the wrong area. I am not saying that prophecy is wrong; please do not think that. However, his focus was in the wrong area, not where God wanted it.

Why do fortune-tellers, tarot card readers, and astrologers do so well? Because every one of us, in our human nature, wants to know what the future holds.

In the Church of the Great God, some in the past have considered a particular Indian tribe as possibly being ancient Israelites. They took much time to study their hieroglyphics, in case God had a message for them there. Interesting!

Some of God's people will almost go to any length to understand and master the future—in spite of being wrong in the past—and their chief quest was to understand when Jesus Christ would return.

Acts 1:6-7 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority."

Matthew 24:36 But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.

Mark 13:32 But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

In spite of these plain statements, men have always sought to understand exactly when Jesus Christ would return.

I Thessalonians 5:2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.

II Peter 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; 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.

It states in Matthew 24:44 that we had best be ready. Now we are beginning to see the purpose that God wants in our lives: for us to be ready, "for in such an hour as we think not, the Son of man comes." This is repeated in Luke 12:40.

In spite of that, mankind has continued to compute when Christ will return. Mr. William Miller, of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, convinced the brethren that Jesus Christ would return on March 21, 1884. They all went out to meet Jesus Christ, and the meeting never took place because this did not happen. Then, when this did not occur, he concluded his calculations were a year off and that Jesus Christ would return October 22, 1884. Again, they went out to meet Christ to no avail. Even though this prophecy failed, his followers, known as Millerites, insisted that choosing the date had started a long process of preparing the world for the Second Coming.

In Japan, not too many years ago, a large group of Seventh Day Adventists gathered on the top of a large office building to meet Christ. The Japanese police followed them up there and surrounded them so that when Jesus Christ did not come they would not throw themselves off the building in wild emotion.

Years ago, one of our ex-Worldwide Church of God ministers, in the Pacific Northwest, left us formed his own flock. He convinced this group that a space ship would pick them up in the desert; and when they went out there, there was no space ship. The last I heard, which was a long time ago, he was going to start a second group. I am sure that one failed, as well.

The Heaven's Gate group were highly intelligent, skilled young people, who rented a large mansion waiting for a passing space ship to take them to whatever. They were convinced, and these were brilliant people. The only catch was that they had to be dead

to make the trip. I do not exactly recall the number, but twenty-five or thirty took sleeping pills and then one man put plastic bags over all of their heads. Then he was the last one, and he destroyed himself. They thought that they would meet on the specific date at which their leader had arrived.

Now, we might smile sadly at some of these things, but it seems to be the flaw in every group to have to figure out the return of Jesus Christ—even the Worldwide Church of God, lest you think our skirts are clean. Though we were not directly told—and I am not picking on Mr. Armstrong; do not even go there—that 1975 was the year that Christ would return or that we would be taken to a place of safety, and though we did not meet on a mountain top or go to the desert or kill ourselves to meet a space ship, we did have a general date; and many took that to mean that the church would probably flee at that time.

The book *1975 in Prophecy* was printed back in 1955. I can understand Mr. Armstrong's thinking that surely within twenty years Christ would have certainly returned.

I can remember some of our members cashing in their retirement and spending it. Some others ran up large charge accounts because they would not have to pay them off. That was not very Christian, either. Others had their backpacks filled with their clothes for the place of safety. I am not laughing at that because we all were caught up in that feeling.

The question that pertains to this message today that every one of us called by God has to ask himself is this: "If I knew the exact time and place of the return of Jesus Christ and was there waiting when He returned, would that mean that I would be in the kingdom?" This is one of those foolish questions that cannot be answered. No man will know the time and place. If we did know the time and place through our own efforts, would that assure us of salvation? The answer is, "Absolutely not." Having this as our total focus is not what Jesus Christ is after, and this is what we have to understand.

Are we to ignore prophecy and just pretend end time events are not occurring? Of course not.

We read in Mark 13 that Peter, James, John, and Andrew came to Jesus Christ and asked Him what the end time events would be that would herald His return. Working from the Harmony of the Gospels, we see what Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 had to say about the time of the return of Jesus Christ. The first warning is to watch out that we are not deceived. Many will come in Jesus' name and deceive the vast majority of mankind. We are warned not to go after them. We are to hear rumors of war, confusions, upheavals, and revolutions. Race will rise up against race, and nation

against nation. There shall be great earthquakes and huge waves—like the tsunami that has recently hit—in different locations; seditions; pestilence; famines; and awesome sights from heaven.

God's people may be persecuted, beaten, and delivered up to religious authorities and possibly brought before governors and national leaders. However, God encourages us that He will put the words in our mouth and that no matter what happens to us, not a hair of our heads will be lost.

Because of the environment of lawlessness, perversion, negativity, hatred, and because of the fact that the people of God are a small force against a world that hates God, the love will wax cold.

It could be a time for some when the people of God are betrayed by their families and former friends.

They will be hated of all people of this world because of their trusting the truth of God and for His name's sake, but those who endure shall be saved. We are told that when Jerusalem is surrounded with armies, we are to know that her desolation is near. Those in Judea are to flee, and those outside the city or in other countries are not to enter her. At this time, there will be false prophets performing great miracles, so that if it were possible even the very elect would be deceived. This is what Jesus Christ is telling them. Because of these days of avenging and hatred, those pregnant or nursing will have a difficult time. At the conclusion of that time there shall be great tribulation, such as never has been from the beginning of the world up to this time; no, nor ever shall be again. Unless those days be shortened, there would not be any living thing left alive; but because of those chosen by God, those days of tribulation shall be shortened.

We are to be aware of the signs of the times for a specific reason. I can recall Mr. Armstrong turning to Ezekiel 33 and going through the scriptures on being a watchman over Israel. He felt that the sense of the passage, as it applied to him, was that if he did not warn Israel on what was coming, then when the trouble came, the blood would be on his head. If they were warned and did not heed, then the blood was on their heads.

Jesus Christ, in a sense, takes the same approach as watchman over His church for us today. He has given us these end-time signs to cause us to remain alert. We are to remain alert as to how we are living. Using the message of Ezekiel, Mr. Armstrong saw his job as watching and warning the world as pointing modern Israel and those called by God to national and individual repentance in this age. The approach to encourage that repentance involved looking at the world events and the events that we have just

reviewed.

Mr. Armstrong told his radio and television audience that the end was near and that they had do something to be saved; it was not just going to happen. The church grew and prospered for many years; but, indeed, the world crept in, and we all let down. Mr. Armstrong died, and God dissolved the church into many smaller groups. Jesus Christ is the Watchman for us today, and indeed He wants us to be aware of end-time events that preface His return. Jesus stresses that is it more important for us to watch areas in which we need to grow than just watching end-time events or warnings

After the warnings of Mark 13 and Luke 21, those writers go on to discuss the subject of the Passover and the events that were to take place at that time; but it is not so with Matthew. In Matthew, after giving us this portion of the Olivet prophecy on what will take place prior to His coming, Jesus Christ gives us four parables in a row. Each one stresses four slightly different areas to watch for the personal overcoming with which He wants us to be concerned. It shows us what He is really after here, and it is not just to watch end-time events. There is more to it.

Matthew 24:42-51 Watch therefore: for you know not what hour your Lord does come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be you also ready: for in such an hour as you think not the Son of man comes. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord has made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he comes shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, that he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, "My lord delays his coming"; and shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looks not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

As in verse 42, he said, "Therefore the Lord will come in an hour when you think not." In Luke 21, he adds to this to a sense of what Christ intends by saying, "Watch that you may be accounted worthy to escape these things that shall come to pass and stand before the Son of Man."

Just as a man does not know when a thief might break in, Jesus tells us that we do not

know when He will return. We are to be prepared and ready to stand before Him. In verses 45-47, Barnes' *Notes* simply says, "The design of the parable is to show that His disciples should act or be living as if they expected His return at any moment."

Who, then, is that faithful servant, doing what he is supposed to? Applied to the ministry, it should be a minister that teaches and feeds the flock faithfully. It can be applied to each family member, each of us being over our own household. In general, it is the holding and doing of one's responsibilities given in life. Those called by God and looking for the return of Jesus Christ would be ever so conscious of what was expected of them in dealing in godly love, ethics, honesty, and concern for everyone with whom they come into contact. They would be doing their own individual work of overcoming. Because of this, when Jesus returns, He knows that He can give them much more opportunity and responsibility in His kingdom.

Verses 48-51 show us that if the servant casts off restraint—thinking in his heart the Lord delays His coming, or "I have more time, so why should I struggle to build the character God wants me to reflect?"—and because of what seems to that servant to be a delay he begins to behave incorrectly, carrying God's name in vain, even though he says he is in the church, he is not. God will note this and correction will come in that day. He will cut him asunder.

Jesus' first admonition is that we watch how we conduct ourselves in dealing with our families, the community responsibilities, and those around us.

I remember that about twelve years ago, a man sent me ten articles on prophecy that he had figured out. This man was also choking his mother to make her do what he wanted, and he was hurting his wife, as well. I read his papers and sent him a note saying, "Thank you for your material; time will tell if your prophetic understanding comes to pass. However, in the meantime, you must do what God wants you to do: quit choking your mother and abusing your wife." Needless to say, I never heard from him, because this is not what he wanted to do.

The parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13 deals with our responsibility in dealing with ourselves and our duty in preparation, faithfulness, and loyalty to our calling—in other words, with being ready. Jesus goes on to state that when the Son of Man returns to judge, it will be as it was in the case of the ten virgins in the marriage ceremony: we will be judged on the same basis individually as the ten virgins are in this parable. The question is, "Have we done all that we can individually to meet Jesus Christ at His return?"

Matthew 25:1-5 Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

The bridegroom here is, of course, Jesus Christ. The virgins are those called by God, pictured here as the maids of honor. The oil is the symbol the Spirit of God. The words *wise* and *foolish* refer to the virgins' conduct regarding the oil. Put another way, the words refer to their conduct and preparedness to participate in the coming wedding.

The wise brought a reserve of oil to be sure that their lamps could be kept burning because they did not know how long their lamps may have to remain lit. They were truly excited about the opportunity that had been given to them. It was extremely important to them and was in their minds; thus, they brought extra oil to ensure that they could participate in the important events that were on the horizon. They clung to the truth in spite of others maybe going to sleep. Outwardly, all of the virgins looked alike; the difference was in their hearts. The wise fixed their vision on the wonderful goal of the wedding procession and the supper, the future of which they had been told. They set aside reserves to ensure themselves of having enough oil to finish what they started, by daily drawing close to God in obedience, prayer, and study.

The unwise were foolish virgins in the sense that they took their position in the wedding procession for granted. They were unconcerned, laid back in working to prepare. The term *foolish* in the sentence could just have easily been translated "careless." It is better translated "not prudent," showing that they did not hold the calling given to them to be as valuable as it was by the wise.

We should note here that each virgin was responsible for her own lamp; it was not a collective responsibility. It was not as though on a wedding day, or two days before, that you could go buy all of the apparel needed to be in the wedding; it was something that could not be done at the last moment. The foolish virgin knew that she had been called to this wonderful honor and awesome occasion; but in light of her immediate activities—perhaps being smothered by the world—preparations seemed able to be put off. It was not important, and she would get to it soon, as she was able. Thus, she took it for granted. It was almost as if she said, "Let me see, where did I put that oil and the lamp? Oh, yes. They are in the back of the garage somewhere." She did not prepare. However, the wise, as they did in those days, took their pole with a metal basket on top and filled the basket full of oil-soaked rags that would burn. They carried an extra

container of oil for marching down the road in the procession.

While the bridegroom tarried or while his coming was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. It is interesting to note that Strong's #2518, indeed, has the meaning of "sleep," but a secondary meaning is "to be spiritually asleep; i.e. secure and unconcerned in sin or indolent or careless in the performance of duty." That is from *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*. In short, both groups were declining spiritually.

Matthew 25:6-13 "And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. 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.' And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."

Here we have another admonition to watch. Before the bridegroom comes, the announcement rings out in the night, and now the differences are made evident for all to see. The unwise had not realized the seriousness of their lack of preparedness. Now fear strikes at their hearts, but it is too late. They now see that they had a false sense of their readiness and that their carelessness had been the height of folly. The foolish, careless virgins expected the bridegroom to come immediately, and they had only enough oil to keep their lamps barely lit. The wise, considering the times to be uncertain, prepared for the possibility, in a sense, of the final gun lap. The wise virgins, even though they had been slumbering, kept doing their prayer, study, meditation, and fasting—the physical things—while the foolish had not.

The foolish requested oil for their lamps because they were flickering and going out, and they had no more oil. However, the wise correctly refused to share because they would not have enough for both. Thus, while the virgins that lacked prudence and fear rushed to buy oil or to catch up to the wise virgins, the bridegroom came; the door was shut; and they were not admitted, as we just read. Verse 13, indeed, drives home the lesson that Jesus Christ is trying to get across to all of us: "Watch you therefore for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming." It is an extremely sobering warning to heed.

The third parable in Matthew 25:14 goes above and beyond the other two parables. We must be prepared and doing our duty, even if time goes on. Also in this parable, God shows that He expects growth and improvement in those called because of all that He has given to each one of us individually.

Matthew 25:14-15 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey."

Verses 14 and 15 depict Jesus Christ going away on a journey and giving those called—the elect, the chosen—gifts described here as talents. These gifts could be some of those found in I Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. They are to be used to serve in the church now but also in the World Tomorrow. These gifts were not just given out with little thought, but Jesus Christ and God the Father carefully gave them according to each individual's ability to use and improve them, gaining additional gifts as a result. The purpose was that these individuals might serve the church and that these servants might go past the basics and go on to perfection. This is what He was after.

Matthew 25:16-18 "Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money."

The one who had received the one talent was like the virgins who were not urgent in preparing their lamps or the steward who began to mistreat his fellow servants. In short, "the accounting time is a long way off so what is the rush about doing things correctly or improving?"

Matthew 25:19-23 "After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few

things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord."

The first two rush to their master with great joy, saying, "Look what we have accomplished!" The master could not be more pleased and states, "Well done, you good and faithful servants! I have wonderful things in store for you because you have done so much."

Matthew 25:24-30 "Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.' But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

He told this servant that he should have done something with the talent that he gave him. At that time, it is all over. Just as the servant who sinned because the Lord delayed His coming and was cut asunder, or as the five foolish virgins who were so busy with the world, so the one who could have achieved so much with his one talent and did not is now faced with the deadly result of his laziness, carelessness, procrastination, and his love of this end time world more than his love for his Lord and Master. The message here, though not specifically stated, is to watch, watch and be continually conscious of the growth that God expects of us.

How important is watching, brethren? It is vital. In the booklet, "Preparing the Bride," John Ritenbaugh pointed out that the Worldwide Church of God fell apart because we neglected to watch. We must hold fast to the truth. Holding fast to the truth of God is the only way we will ever receive our crown and be in the Kingdom of God. It is interesting to note that the very next section that Jesus covers is the reward that comes for those who have done their best to watch and take on the nature of Jesus Christ.

Sheep have been considered emblematic of mildness and simplicity in patience and usefulness and are listed here as genuine disciples of Jesus Christ who follow the shepherd. As it says in Revelation 14:4, the 144,000 follow Jesus Christ wherever He goes. Goats have always been considered naturally quarrelsome, foul smelling, and symbolic of quarrelsome, stubborn people.

In Matthew 25:31-32 is the setting of the time of showing who belongs to Jesus Christ. It is a time of judgment when He divides those who have been individually watching and who have been diligent in doing their prayer, study, fasting, and meditating and, in doing so, have taken on the very nature of God without even realizing it—as opposed to those who have just gone through the motions. They all shared the same pasture, and all had the same instruction and the same opportunity; but now comes the separating of the sheep and the goats, and in a sense, the wheat and the tares.

Matthew 25:31-34 "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...'"

Now the sheep are set at the right hand, which is the position of honor. The stubborn goats are on the left, a position of disfavor. Then, to those on the right come the most welcome words that every one of us wants to hear: "Come you blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Why were they so special? What made them stand out? We can read what they did here:

Matthew 25:34-41 "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.' Then He will also

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say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'

The reason that they were so special? In John 14:8-9, Philip asked Jesus to show them the Father. Jesus responded, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father." All of the thoughtful things that Jesus Christ did—staying up night after night to cast out demons, to heal the sick; the thoughtfulness of feeding the five thousand; the taking of abuse; the healing of the man that was dead in his coffin whose poor widowed mother would have no one care for her—everything He did is exactly what God the Father would have done had He been in Jesus' place. It is the same with the sheep, though not on the same level as Jesus Christ. It could be said that if you have seen My sheep, you have seen the Father and His Son in action.

Matthew 25:46 "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Those who have watched will receive eternal life!

Brethren, the overall purpose of this wonderful calling that we have been given is to overcome this end-time world ruled by Satan and take on the nature of God. It is easy to understand.

For those of us who are older or who have been in the church for some time, we see a world around us that we no longer recognize. I am not talking about television, DSL, or computers; but we see that the civilization around us is a culture that we do not even recognize. We live in a world whose values and lifestyles are a far cry from the environment that we remember, though we may remember it with rose-colored glasses, because there were problems back then, too. This world has us focus on one disaster, perversion, or sin after another. It has been stated, "I hate to watch the news, because I cannot do a thing about it." That is true. There is no doubt that this world wears at us. This world exacerbates whatever habits, ways of thinking, pulls of the flesh, or intellect that differs from the mind of God. Again, as time goes on, this world really causes us to fray at the edges. We have to realize that this world's system and way of living is the "hole"; it is not the "doughnut."

I John 2:17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

Put another way, those who carefully watch and perform what is required of them and live God's way will live forever. There is so much to look at in this world that may be interesting, but it works to take us away from where we need to be. Where does our focus need to be?

Mark 12:28 Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?"

Which is the greatest commandment—not the first in order but the most important? Evidently, the Jews had quite a category of commandments, greater and smaller, laws of sacrifice, circumcision, regarding purifications, and so forth. The question was not as frivolous to the lawyer as it might seem. Jesus Christ went right to the heart of the matter, stating that we should love God the Father with our whole heart, with all of our faculties and powers.

What does it mean to love God? The world around us loves a god with which they can just about do whatever they want. Because they are "under grace," whatever they do, God will just love them. It does not matter. They can make God in their own image. However, this is not what is being said here. Strong's #25 means "to esteem, to love, indicating a direction of the will." In other words, our will is to be His will, finding one's joy in something or someone. In these specific verses, it means that we love God as our superior, One whom we are going to obey. It includes the idea of doing our duty and having great respect and veneration with the meaning to love and to serve God with faithfulness.

We know today many worship rock stars, and they imitate them. We say, "How can they do that?" but they do, in hairstyles, dress styles, all of that. The principle is the same: we are to imitate God. That is what it is about. How do we show that love? He is always to come first; and we are to love Him absolutely, more than any person or anything and with all of the passion possible. We are to fix our affection on Him completely and more firmly than on anything else. We must be willing to give up all that we hold dear should it be required. We are to stand fast and not budge no matter what comes upon us. We are to love Him with all of our soul and all of life, meaning that we are willing to give up our life to Him, to devote it to His service and be faithful to the end of our lives. We must live as we know that is correct.

The next one is the hard one. With all of our mind, we are to submit our intellect to His will. This is a really a difficult thing to do, because we want to go the way we have

always gone. We are to love His gospel more than we do our desires and the decisions of our own mind. Satan knows how to play this card, and he will work at us and work at us to try to do things our way. In short, we are to be willing to submit with all of our being to God's teaching and to His guidance. With all of our strength we are to love Him, as well. We have all been given different gifts, talents, and abilities; and we are to use these to His glory in whatever we do. We must stand up for what is right and do the best job we can with the abilities and the talents that He has given us—with honoring Him in serving in the church, in the workplace, and in our homes, in every facet of our lives—and produce a light that can be seen.

Nobody is going to pay attention to you if start quoting scripture, but they will when you live a certain lifestyle and set a certain example. We had one man, a church member, that just recently went to a place where all of the people were risqué and doing things that were wrong. He said that he would not do that, and they laughed at him; but he was setting a light that will be remembered long after either he has left or they have left.

I can recall one time, not that I am setting an example here, but I was to give three classes at the National Sales meeting, and I kept juggling the date. I said, "It cannot be on this date because it is the Feast of Tabernacles." You know where God put it? Right on the Feast of Tabernacles. I had to go to my vice president and I had to say that I could not be there because I had a church convention to attend. Six months later, one of the product managers said, "You know, I have seen people talk about their religion, but you live it." I could not have had the meeting at that time, but it was an example to him; and that encouraged me.

This is the first and the great commandment; it is the base or foundation for obedience from which all other commandments are to spring. If our focus and love is here, then our affections and actions will be on course in all of what He expects of us. This will please Him greatly and He will increase our spirit.

"And the second," He said, "is like the first." It is important like the first; it is pure; it is dignified; and it is useful. In short, we must truly set our heart and our mind to reflect God's teaching in all of our dealings with our fellowman. They are talking about making the world a democracy. That is not going to bring peace. This is what is going to bring peace.

Mark 12:29-34 Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LOORD our God, the LOORD is one. And you shall love the LOORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it,

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is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." So the scribe said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." But after that no one dared question Him.

These two commandments comprise the substance of what is spoken of in the law given by Moses, the prophets, and by Jesus Christ and His disciples. To love God encompasses or grasps the whole of what our calling is all about and causes us to do our very best to live by it. The important thing there is to love God.

How intimately is God involved with us?

Mark 9:41 For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.

That has just always really meant something to me. As in Matthew 25, with the separating of the sheep and the goats, this small act of giving a glass of water to a member out of genuine love and concern for his wellbeing is something that we might think of as being insignificant. Yet, because of Jesus Christ's intimate relationship with each of us, it will not be forgotten. Barnes' *Notes* comments that the feeblest service will be accepted, and acts of love that may be forgotten by men will be remembered by Christ.

I had a touching thing happen to me down in Trinidad. We met so many people that I could not remember their names, but they are wonderful people. This one very nice lady had a pin on the lapel of her coat. I said, "That is a beautiful pin." It was silver and was very intricate. I just complimented her on it and did not give a single thought to it. As we began to finish the Sabbath, she came up to me with this little thing wrapped in a Kleenex. I had no idea what it was, and I did not want to open it at that time. She said, "I want you to take this home." I said, "Thank you so very much." Back at the hotel I opened it, and there was the pin that was on her jacket. This is something that I think Christ remembered greatly.

With all of the signs of the times, brethren, and the events taking place in this world, our focus must be on performing what is required of us in our love for God the Father and Jesus Christ and for our fellow man. Does this mean that we are not to notice what is taking place around us or put our mind on trying to understand prophecy? Of course not. God has given us prophecy that we might be encouraged by it and that we might be warned by it.

Prophecy is given for two reasons, basically: one, that we see prophecy fulfilled, which tells us that God is in charge. We see that He forecasted that Tyre would be dissolved after 1,500 years, and he named Nebuchadnezzar. He prophesied in Ezekiel that Tyre would be destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar; not only that, but the entire city's stones and so forth would be cast into the sea. Later came Alexander the Great, and he took the stones and cast them into the sea and made a causeway 2,000 feet long and a couple hundred feet wide. He built siege towers to take it down, and he cast all of the stones into the sea. That is something that God forecast.

He forecasted the downfall of Egypt, and He made the comment that Nebuchadnezzar had not received payment when he took Tyre. Because they had moved out to new Tyre across the inlet there, He gave Nebuchadnezzar Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar took it and was rewarded.

You see where Sidon, Lebanon today, was prophesied not to be destroyed but to continue always in war. No one wants to buy real estate in Lebanon today. That is a bad spot to buy it. We see where God has intervened in the past and brought things to pass. No king who was Egyptian would reign and that Egypt would become debased after being the prime country for however many years. When we see this done, we know that what God has prophesied in the past and brought to pass—such as even leaving Egypt in this Passover season—we know that what He promises to do in the future will happen, as well.

This is the first reason, in short: because of past fulfillment, we can be confident of future fulfillment, and that should be encouraging to each one of us. The second reason it is given is for a warning of what is to come that we might be exhorted and encouraged not to let down but to overcome that we might make it into His kingdom. Those are the two reasons for prophecy. Many have gone off into other avenues, but these are the two reasons that God has put prophecy here. Thus, how can anyone be warned by it if prophecy is not examined from time to time? We are told that when we see these things beginning to come to pass to look up, for our redemption draws near as we see the events taking place.

What the Pope's death will bring on the world I have no idea. There have been many prophetic suppositions on what the Pope's death will mean. Jesus Christ is in charge and He will bring it to pass, whatever it is. What Jesus is telling us, then, is to observe the signs of the times but not get totally caught up in them. If we are not careful, they can become the "hole" as they have for so many. The "doughnut" and what this calling is all about is to put the emphasis of our lives into obedience to God and build godly character. This is what our job is.

Let us put a cap on this. God is love! In I Corinthians 13, Paul covers all of the physical things here. God is love, and we are to become like that love.

I Corinthians 13:1-2 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

Taking on the nature of God is what this is all about.

I Corinthians 13:3-8 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.

Prophecies will go by the board but the character of God will remain.

I Corinthians 13:9-12 For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

We have the character of God and have watched our life and how we are progressing. Brethren, every one of us has been given a work to do.

Mark 13:32-33 But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is.

Take heed is Strong's #91, and it means "to be able to see what course you are on; to perceive as with the eyes," meaning "to discern or understand." As it is used here it means "caution; to take heed; to be on watch." Look to it. Stop, look, and consider how you are living and what you are doing with your life.

Also in verse 33 it says to "watch." In Strong's, that is #69; and it means to not allow ourselves to go to sleep spiritually, but to be watchful, vigilant, and attentive to spiritual things. He is not saying to watch all of the events that are coming as a primary thing. He is saying to watch and be vigilant and attentive in spiritual things, because we do not know the time of Christ's return.

Mark 13:34 "It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch."

Here, Jesus Christ tells us that we each have a work to do, and then commands the porter, spoken of here as the shepherd keeping watch at the door, to watch. I am going to read this from the New English Bible as it makes it a little clearer.

Mark 13:34 (NEB) It is like a man away from home, he has left his house and put his servants in charge, each one with his own work to do.

That is each one of us, as well as the ministry. He has ordered the doorkeeper to stay awake; that is what the word *watch* means. Simply put, Jesus wants us all to understand that we have been given the task of diligently completing the calling given to us by God the Father. That is our work.

The word *watch* in the last part of verse 34 and through the end of the chapter is different from the word *watch* in verse 33. This is #1127 in Strong's, with a meaning of having the duty of vigilance combined with prayer in regard to the day Jesus Christ will

return. It is coupled with the sense of having vigilance concerning the trials we face and not being put down by them and being aware of the temptations that come upon us, as well. We need to pray to God to help us to resist those temptations and to overcome them. This is what is encompassed in that word *watch*.

Is watching necessary? I think all of us can look back over the years and see that many have started on this course, excited at the prospect of the return of Jesus Christ. I think that all of us can remember in the Worldwide Church of God how we sat and talked about the Kingdom of God coming, talking about how exciting it would be in the World Tomorrow. We talked about how beautiful it would be. Maybe some of it was rather foolish, but we were excited about that. However, it was not to be at that time.

As time went on, consciously or unconsciously, they felt that the Lord delays His coming. In the 70s, people started to leave and things started to happen. As a result of that attitude, they neglected to watch or to keep their focus on where it needed to be. As a result, their past habits and pulls were again beginning to take control; and they failed to notice that their past spiritual growth began to ebb slowly and drift away, until they left and gave up this wonderful future that God held in store for them.

Hebrews 2:1 Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.

One analogy I read on this was that it is like a rowboat being tied up next to a dock. The rope slips loose, and at first the rowboat just sits there and does not go anywhere. Then, maybe it moves two or three feet away, and then again, maybe ten or fifteen feet. Then you go do something else, and the rowboat is off on the horizon. This is what is being described here.

Brethren, neither God the Father nor Jesus Christ wants us to miss out on the wonderful future They have prepared for us; thus, there are many admonitions by Jesus Christ for us to watch. Let us deeply consider the warning given in these last verses of Mark 13:

Mark 13:35-37 Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.