

When The Trumpet Blows

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Given 04-Oct-05; Sermon #741C

In this society that we live in, we all have an image or an event that comes to mind when we hear the sound of a trumpet. The image may be of a horse race about to start at a local track. It could be a picture back in the days of the old Westerns, of a bugler sounding the cavalry charge. For those who were in the service, it may bring the image of Taps being played for lights out on the post.

For those in the church, though we do not know for sure, there is the longing to hear the trumpet that heralds the return of Jesus Christ, and the last trump that will sound the end of man's foolish and wicked rule over this world, the end of rule guided by Satan's influence, that has brought so much pain to all of mankind. This will be stopped and taken away.

For those Bible historians, certainly the intimidating blast of the trumpet sounding in ever-increasing intensity as the Ten Commandments were about to be given. Of course, Numbers 10 might come to mind as well, as this is the chapter that shows how Israel was moved, by the sound of a trumpet, this tribe and that tribe and the commands that were given.

But, biblically in Israel's physical history, the sound of the trumpet to many meant the immediate warning—the image of imminent war, death, and destruction.

Here are a few examples:

Jeremiah 4:19-22 O my soul, my soul! I am pained in my very heart! My heart makes a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because you have heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. Destruction upon destruction is cried, for the whole land is plundered. Suddenly my tents are plundered, and my curtains in a moment. How long will I see the standard, and hear

the sound of the trumpet? "For My people are foolish, they have not known Me. They are silly children, and they have no understanding. They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge."

Jeremiah 6:1-8 "O you children of Benjamin, gather yourselves to flee from the midst of Jerusalem! Blow the trumpet in Tekoa, and set up a signal-fire in Beth Hacerem; for disaster appears out of the north, and great destruction. I have likened the daughter of Zion to a lovely and delicate woman. The shepherds with their flocks shall come to her. They shall pitch their tents against her all around. Each one shall pasture in his own place. Prepare war against her; arise, and let us go up at noon. Woe to us, for the day goes away, for the shadows of the evening are lengthening. Arise, and let us go by night, and let us destroy her palaces." For thus has the LORD of hosts said: "Cut down trees, and build a mound against Jerusalem. This is the city to be punished. She is full of oppression in her midst. As a fountain wells up with water, so she wells up with her wickedness. Violence and plundering are heard in her. Before Me continually are grief and wounds. Be instructed, O Jerusalem, lest My soul depart from you; lest I make you desolate, a land not inhabited."

Jeremiah 6:9-10 Thus says the LORD of hosts: "They shall thoroughly glean as a vine the remnant of Israel; as a grape-gatherer, put your hand back into the branches." To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear? Indeed their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot give heed. Behold, the word of the LORD is a reproach to them; they have no delight in it.

In a very real sense this is the environment that we are in and we have to make sure that our ear can hear what God is talking about.

Jeremiah 6:11-17 Therefore I am full of the fury of the LORD. I am weary of holding it in. "I will pour it out on the children outside, and on the assembly of young men together; for even the husband shall be taken with the wife, the aged with him who is full of days.

And their houses shall be turned over to others, fields and wives together; for I will stretch out My hand against the inhabitants of the land," says the LORD. "Because from the least of them even to the greatest of them, everyone is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely.

They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, saying, 'Peace, peace!' when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed; nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time I punish them, they shall be cast down," says the LORD. Thus says the LORD: "Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.' Also, I set watchmen over you, saying, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!' But they said, 'We will not listen.'

Brethren, we come from the same stock, with the same nature. If God continues to follow His pattern we, as a nation, will suffer great correction. The point of this today is that we do not wish or want, or we should not want, to be part of that correction.

Zephaniah 1:14-18 The great day of the LORD is near; it is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers. "I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like refuse." Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD'S wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy, for He will make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land.

Zephaniah 2:1-3 Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, O undesirable nation, before the decree is issued, or the day passes

like chaff, before the LORD's fierce anger comes upon you, before the day of the LORD's anger comes upon you! Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the LORD's anger.

You seek the Lord in humility, before the decree is issued, before events come to pass. Or, to put it simply, you get your act together now while you have the opportunity to do it.

Ezekiel 33:1-5 Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, speak to the children of your people, and say to them: 'When I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from their territory and make him their watchman, when he sees the sword coming upon the land, if he blows the trumpet and warns the people, then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, but did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But he who takes warning will save his life.'"

Brethren, this is the direction that I would like to continue in and for all of us to deeply consider, because we are God's special people. Will we take the warning?

Philippians 3:17-19 Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.

I could not believe that after the Worldwide Church of God split up some people could not wait to go out and buy lobster, shrimp, and crab. They could not wait to get away from the instruction that God had given them through Herbert W. Armstrong.

Philippians 3:20-21 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

As citizens of heaven we have been given a special insight that this world does not have.

I do not know whether you have considered this, but the world as a whole really does not expect the final trumpet will be blown. They expect wars, but they do not have any real understanding as to the utter devastation that is about to befall them, and they will not know it until the final trumpet is sounded in whatever form that is.

But we, the Family of God, have been given the revealed insight as to this fact that the final trumpet is going to be blown.

Will change be possible if we wait until the trumpet is sounded? The parable in Matthew 25 concerning the ten virgins indicates that it will not be possible for at least five virgins, or half, to increase their supply of oil.

Why does God give us this advanced warning? So that we might be able to follow the advice given in Zephaniah 2, which is to get our act together. Cover the flaws that you see in yourself with weaknesses that have plagued you and that you brought into the church with you when God called you. At last, get serious about overcoming that God may save us.

I do not think that we begin to see the danger of living in this world, and the effect it has on us. I really do not. It is something like the frog being boiled in the water slowly. We are slowly being immersed deeper and deeper into this society.

Times are relatively good. We are the most powerful nation in the world, we are blessed financially and economically as a people, and we live in a society that does not persecute us, allowing us to live as we wish. Every attitude of this society shouts at us, telling us that we can live any way, or any life style we want to. Why? Because everyone is doing it.

At the same time, more than ever before we see the world around us in confusion, with decisions being made in this country we find hard to understand. We see same sex marriages, abortions, and perverted sex guaranteed by law, and the Ten Commandments taken out of courthouses, etc.

This, coupled with gang violence and freeway shootings. In Los Angeles we have had six close to our house; we have had 28 freeway shootings since March, plus we have couples *living* together now surpassing married couples.

We see the American people owing more personal debt than ever before with little savings; this, coupled with wars, terrorists, and fuel shortages gives us, as a people, an uneasy feeling that seems to be put in the closet by seeking more pleasure.

As for us in the church, we pray for God's Kingdom to come and still this world keeps on churning in the same destructive pattern. People say "Where is God at this time?" We wonder why God puts us through so many trials and yet you have to look at Jesus Christ. God did not pull any short stops for Him. There is a reason for that too.

I think we all agree that this is the Laodicean era. I would like to go through that perhaps a little differently than John did.

As John brought out too, I think that we like to consider ourselves as being Philadelphians. We have memories of the "old times" when we were fired up with excitement over being called. We walked softly and carefully concerning all of God's commandments. We would rarely, but more likely never, miss a Sabbath service except for illness or traveling, and even then the rest of the family would be there. Even our friends or relatives that came to visit us knew that we would always attend services on the Sabbath, and adjusted their day accordingly. Visitors were not a reason for staying home from the Sabbath. Church was the place to be on the Sabbath and we would not let anything stop us.

Families were united because they were a family unit in the church that was going to go to the Place of Safety. Children were taught God's laws that they

might grow up correctly and honor God. Television viewing and movies were carefully considered for content lest one's mind allow wrong images or thoughts to take root.

But, living in this world today, in this era of God's church, can we honestly say that we really are Philadelphians, or that we have not let down?

There is no doubt that we are living in the Laodicean era of God's church at this time, and it is one of the most dangerous eras for a Christian to live in. I would like to paraphrase Revelation 3:14-22. [Paraphrased scriptures appear in italics.]

Jesus Christ states His office as the one who is the true and faithful witness (in contrast to the Laodicean's faithlessness) and the one who began creation. In short, the one who we will be personally judged by and have to answer to.

"I see you daily, and I know your mindset and your works that you are neither cold (the opposite of hot) or hot. Oh how I wish you were one or the other! What I wish is that you were one or the other, then I could work with you."

Vows or promises have been made, and anything is an improvement where love is professed, but in reality love does not exist unfulfilled. Sad as a true cold state is, at least it is honest.

Lukewarm can be described as being complacent, compromising, slothful in study, selfish, and in making an idol of oneself and one's desires, self-satisfied, cozy, comfortable, indifferent, and inconsistent in one's relationship with God.

Thus God says: *"Because you have lost your love for Me, and neglect to obey Me from the heart, just as warm water causes the stomach to become nauseous and vomit, so I will vomit you out of My mouth, because I react to you as if you are the water that produces vomiting."*

A terrible thing to say about an individual. The term 'I am rich' can either refer to being wealthy in the monies and riches of this world, or it can mean feeling spiritually rich with God.

"I am cool and have it made. I am increased in the knowledge of God, and really doing well in that department, as well as being well off financially, which of course is a sure sign that God has blessed me."

As John said, Laodiceans are probably hard workers in the business sense. In contrast, the poor in spirit recognize how far they fall and that they have need of everything that God can give.

"And because of this over-confident, self-aggrandizing, puffed up attitude you cannot see that you are wretched, that your condition is wretched, and yet in your sight you think yourself to be fine."

God does not want to lose these people if He can help it.

"And you are to be pitied in all your wealth and complacency, and you are poor in what counts with God. And the sad part of this is that you are blind to the reality of your condition, and because of this you are naked, not clothed with salvation at this time."

We have had people come into the church that have focused on hair length or skirt length by an inch. To these people this signifies righteousness. As John brought out this morning ["Don't Lose Your Focus!"], you love God with all of your heart and you truly love your neighbor and you have patience, kindness, forgiveness, and mercy towards them. That is what God is after, that is the nature of God. How long has He been kind and patient with us?

"The sad part of this is that you are blind to the reality of your condition and because of this you are naked and not clothed with salvation at this time. You are not in that category."

For us in this end time era, God counsels us, *"Look at yourself, examine yourself. How diligent are you?"* As it says in I Corinthians 10:12, "He who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

For those that consider themselves rich spiritually or monetarily, perhaps they feel they can buy off Christ by their "good works." Indeed the goods of Jesus are freely given, yet they have their price or cost—renunciation of the

self, and of what this end time world so freely offers us that is wrong for us. Those are the sacrifices that we have to make.

We are to buy gold purified, or perfected, in the fire that you may be truly rich. In other words, we are to insist that we build godly character. Perhaps we have not heard this in a long time and maybe it seems too tough.

Mr. Armstrong's definition of godly character was right on the button. Godly character is:

The attainment of the ability, in a separate independent entity of free moral agency, to be able to discern right from wrong, the true values from the false, truth from error, the right way from the wrong. And then make the right choice or decision, even against self-desire, impulse, or temptation, plus the will and self-discipline to resist the wrong and do the right.

That is no small thing that God wants from us and it is no small thing for us to accomplish! All of this is so that you may be clothed in white raiment or righteousness; that you may be clothed with the garments of salvation; that you may have the proper wedding garment and not be found shamefully lacking.

To accomplish this He tells you/us to open our eyes to the reality of what this world is about, and how short the time appears to be. In short, humble ourselves in fasting, study; see the intent of what God's calling is all about, and cease to compromise His laws in any fashion.

"Do you not understand that it is because I love you greatly—I gave My life for you—that I correct you as a loving parent? I want you to respond by really working to repent, I want you to get back your first love, and be diligent in prayer, study, and fasting. Do not let this era trap you!"

Though they were letting down, Jesus had not shut the door. Despite the disgusting and offensive attitudes and conduct they were exhibiting, and to the extent that He was ready to vomit them out of His mouth, Jesus Christ still holds His hand out to them.

The example He uses is one of knocking on a door, and being admitted. In doing so, He is telling us that He has not forgotten us, but is deliberately knocking (not pounding, but rapping with His knuckles) and reminding us of the seriousness of the times, the era, and environment we are living in. He wants us to admit Him once again into our lives. Not with lip service, but with every fiber of our being. Not half-heartedly, but with our *whole* heart.

If they do this He will spend time with them in drawing them close to Him and in again kindling and energizing His Spirit in them to actions that will carry them through this difficult end time to a great reward!

"To him that overcomes, who is victorious, who conquers the forces, the adversaries of the kingdom of God, there will be a reward."

And what will that reward be? To rule with Jesus Christ and to be an exciting and important part of His kingdom and government, sharing in the honors and triumphs. Because just as Jesus Christ had to overcome and suffered more than any man and was raised to His kingship, sitting down with His Father, so will those be who listen to that knock, overcome and draw close to Him.

"He that hears, and discerns the truth of what Jesus is saying. Let him take heed and take action."

This is the message that Jesus is sending to us, His people who are living in this last end time era. This is His message to each one of us today.

Where are we in prophecy at this time?

I will not be specific. Over the many years in the church I have heard quite a few men tell us where they felt we were in prophecy, and other than the broad term "in the last days" they were, in fact, not sure where we were. But I think today I can pretty accurately point out just where we are in prophecy.

Matthew 25:1-3 "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, . . .

They were not doing the things that were guaranteeing that the lamp could be kept burning once it was lit or once the event came.

Matthew 25:4-13 ". . . but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' 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."

The bridegroom said what we never want to hear, "I don't know you, you didn't care enough about your calling at all and you went back to the world." Then in the next parable:

Matthew 25:14-30 "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. 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. 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.'

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.'"

Where are we in prophecy at this time? We are in the time between hearing that the bridegroom is going to get married, and the time that he actually comes. We are in prophecy where the owner of the field or the house has given the talents or the gifts and he has gone away and we are waiting for the Lord of the manor to come back.

In the Parable of the Ten Virgins, half did not make it. In Matthew 24 (the man traveling to the far country) two-thirds responded to what they had been given, working diligently to accomplish what had been expected of them, but one third, or in this case the individual given the one talent, failed to respond. Perhaps the one that did not make it thought there was still a space of time to

make up for lost time. After all, his lord's journey had been long, and as much time had gone by the boards, who is to say his lord would even come back at all. In short, I will work on myself tomorrow, or maybe next week, or maybe someday down the road I will start to make up for that.

The bottom line to all these parables, and the one in Luke 19, is that there would be a time period from being invited to the wedding supper, or from the giving of special talents or gifts, where time would seem to slow down and all the events we waited for would be put on hold. To me, brethren, this is exactly where we are at this time right now.

This, coupled with living in the last era of God's church, tells me that we are definitely in the time not to let down. It is a time that would be easy to let down in, but we are living in the most dangerous time for a member of God's church that has ever existed in our lifetimes.

There used to be a saying that I have mentioned before, that the church was always 20 percent better than the world. But when the world declined 30 or 40 percent, the sad part is that we were still only 20 percent better than the world. We declined as well.

Looking back over almost forty years in the church one can see the tremendous contrast of the church then and the church today.

As I mentioned earlier, there was a first love that lasted for years. Mr. Armstrong referred to that time as the Philadelphia era of God's church.

Revelation 3:7 "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens.'"

Mr. Armstrong taught us many times that the key of David was who Israel is today. He brought out that God opened it and nobody could shut it.

Revelation 3:8-13 "I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. Indeed I will

make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Wake up and listen! This society tends to make you deaf. We who felt we were a part of that era had little strength but did our best to keep God's Word and not deny His name. We went through many trials with our jobs, school, and everything else.

Because of this, Jesus Christ states that we will be worshipped, and those God sees as His who followed His command to persevere, will be kept from the hour of trial that is to come upon the world. We believed that we would be pillars in God's temple receiving a name which reflects God, and the city of New Jerusalem which will come down from heaven.

At that time everybody truly appreciated their calling. I mean they really appreciated it. It just staggers me of all the people on the face of the earth that we have the truth. The veil has been lifted from our eyes. Yet, sometimes because time has gone on, we can take it so much for granted. Every Sabbath every member was there unless serious sickness or travel truly required they be elsewhere. To miss a Sabbath was unthinkable. God says do not forsake your assembling to encourage, brighten, and support each other.

We were all a part of a special group called by God to serve Him and mankind in the world tomorrow. Coming to church was special because we were coming right before God, thus we shined our shoes, and wore our best

suits and ties, and the ladies wore attractive dresses. We talk about coming before President Bush and how we would dress to come before him and yet some come to church today in a very casual fashion.

As it is today, each minister had a different style. We had some that could be counted on to talk about prophecy, which was exciting, and they had humor and we had those who were considered dry in their speaking. I remember once I told my local elder, "I like so-and-so better than I do this man." He said, "Mr. Reid, you know what your problem is? You like to be entertained."

But no one complained because they were God's ministers and they were bringing us the truth. We could always find something profitable in every message. A good question to ask here is, "Are we that way today?"

Bible studies were always well attended, and when *The Plain Truth* arrived, it was quickly devoured from cover to cover. Mr. Armstrong's broadcast was on every Sunday morning, and we all listened to it.

But, then in the late sixties and early seventies, things began to change. The world around us was becoming very liberal in their thinking, and slowly it crept into the church. It affected the members and it affected the ministry. Some members left, which was a shock to us all.

Raymond McNair once said that the person left because he was tired of the battle. He had been in the warfare too long and he wanted to leave. To me it was not warfare, it was wonderful, we had the truth. But, slowly people began to leave and ministers began to leave and tended to change teachings.

Still the church held together, but then after Mr. Armstrong's death, coupled with the heretical changes, the bottom dropped out. Some 100,000 or better drifted away and left the church.

In all honesty, I have to ask the question of myself and of you, "Do we still have that same zeal today, or have we let down?" If we have that zeal and that first love it should be with maturity now as perhaps it was not at that time.

Now we find ourselves a remnant. The large body we felt secure in is no longer there and that is good for us. Now we have to really focus on God and rely on Him, and not on a huge number of people. In a sense, we are like those in Acts who were scattered into small groups meeting in homes.

I think it is wise that we consider the environment that we are in at this end time and what it is able to do with us. Again, I am going paraphrase I Timothy 4:1-2 rather than read the scripture. *"Some shall depart from the faith, yielding to seducing spirits."*

That has happened.

The Holy Spirit speaks plainly, not through a glass darkly, not with hints, or shadowy visions, but openly and clearly. It says that in these times in which we are living, some would depart from the truth. Based on what is says in II Thessalonians 2:3—"there would be a falling away,"—it seems it will be a large one. I think we can relate to that.

The reason for it is rather than listening to the Spirit of God, or studying His Word, they gave heed to seducing influences, showing that a great corrupt system would work to destroy God's people and the world. Amos 8:11-14 tells us that there will be a famine of *hearing* the Word, and that many will be captured by false Eastern religions, New Age beliefs, etcetera—giving heed to devilish teaching.

"Some members had their consciences seared with a hot iron by listening to those speaking lies."

This is a warning to stay away from false doctrine or teaching no matter how titillating it might be. I remember I told one lady, "You know you really shouldn't look at that stuff that you're reading." She said, "You can't tell me what to read or what not to read." I said, "You're right, but I have the authority and the right to warn you, and that is what I am doing. You can do whatever you want."

Paul's second warning letter to Timothy as to what this society will be like and the environment that we will be subject to is in II Timothy. I am just

going to paraphrase II Timothy 3:1-5 because I want you to see the society that we live in and the attitudes here that can slowly infect us and invade our thinking or slowly make us feel hopeless that nothing can change.

To the church: *"Be aware in the last times, work to hold on to the purity God requires."* Why?

"Because the days preceding the return of Jesus Christ will be perilous and dangerous."

It will be a time for men to fight to keep a righteous conscience. That is what it is going to take and we will see that in a few moments.

"Lovers of their own selves . . ."

It will be one of the signs of the times that men will have a self-love, or be exceedingly selfish, wanting things their own way. They will be base, hateful, and narrow in their thinking.

"They will be covetous—putting a desire for money and things as being most important in their lives."

We have corporations like Enron who have taken the money of the people who made the corporation great, by *their* work, and stolen it for their pleasure. There was a man that just recently went to jail. He had a \$2 million birthday party. He rented an island and he brought in call girls, bands, and the whole works to celebrate his birthday. Did he think of the people that he was depriving of their retirement? No, not a bit. This is what Paul is talking about here.

"People will boast, be vain, valuing themselves far above others, bragging, or taking credit for what others have done. They will be haughty and puffed up. They will speak impiously against God, His way of living and their fellow man, putting God and His commandments down."

That is being done today all of the time.

"Children will be disobedient to their parents and will be headstrong. Orderly homes will be few and far between because our nation is just running downhill. Those who are not thankful will be filled with the crime of ingratitude, thus showing the decline in the nation and of the appreciation for all they have been given."

We must never become ungrateful. We must never just take for granted all that we have received without giving thanks.

"Those who fail in their duty toward God and have no belief, or respect for God or His Word will be unholy. They will be without natural affection. They will not have thoughtfulness, concern, or love toward their fellow man."

These people are those who would abort their own children and others; those who would use their children in the most perverted and despicable of ways in videos to be sold around the world. This is in the Israelitish nations and I guess everywhere else. This is not natural affection.

"They will be truce breakers. Those ready to promise anything to get what they want with no intent to perform."

Today we have companies who steal pension funds from their employees, not honoring the law nor those who worked to make them successful, and none of us trust the deceptive marketing that is thrown at us today.

"They are those who slander freely without thought of who is being hurt. They are out of control, and slaves to sin and uncleanness. They are harsh, fierce, and despisers of those that are good. They are severe, meanspirited, cruel, and they hate the righteous and what they stand for."

"Traitors"—this is the only time this word is used in the New Testament and it means one who would betray his friend or country. One who is totally untrustworthy. Again, this is the environment we find ourselves in.

"Heady"—this word is only used here in the New Testament, and it means literally to fall forward; one who is rash, who would embark on schemes without thinking or considering the consequences.

"High-minded"—lifted up with conceit, the opposite of humility.

"Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God"—those who lust after sensual, or vain amusements. This has been, and is today, the characteristic of the world. Many in this world if asked, will respond that they want to live for the "good life." In this environment few—very few—love God today.

As one commentator put it, "They have religion in their creed, but not in their hearts." But the truth is they deny God, not allowing God's Word to have any influence over their lives.

Though we all know of fine people in the world today, the overriding attitude of the multitudes of the churches and society is easily seen in the above scriptures.

The apostle Peter talks to us as well, but specifically from a personal church perspective. Peter had the same problem and he knew that he had to remind the people to stand.

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

He said, "I am writing to you to cause you to remember specific truths that you might not forget their importance in these difficult times." The term "pure minds" means minds that will look at things as in bright sunlight, and see them clearly; minds that are not confused or wrapped up in this world, but those that will have the clarity of God in their minds and they will be able to see things.

II Peter 3:2 . . . 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, . . .

"That you do not drift off in these loose times but remember what has been told to you from the prophets such as Jude, who told you there would be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts."

Peter goes on to say they should follow the teaching of the apostles, and that of Jesus Christ, and not follow Gnostic teachings.

II Peter 3:3 . . . knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, . . .

Peter is saying that in these last days, however long they shall be, those who mock and ridicule anything pertaining to God, His laws, and the return of His Son, will be with us. This will be a part of the society we live in to try to cause us to stumble. He said you are to be forewarned because to be forewarned is to be forearmed.

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

They say, "Of all the prognostications that have gone forth, how many have come to pass? Zip, zero, none of them. Others have waited their whole life for Christ's return, and died waiting. After all, the earth's physical laws have been here since creation, thousands of years, and nothing has happened to show any instability or sign that it will not continue for another thousand years."

They say, "Tomorrow is just going to be like today, it is going to be good."

II Peter 3:5-6 For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water.

They who think that way hold the opinion that all things will continue as they have, but they are ignorant, choosing not to remember that the earth has not always been stable.

They forget that just as now, the earth looked stable, but then the skies opened, and the fountains of the deep broke forth and a flood killed all but eight souls.

II Peter 3:7 But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

Now, just as then, the earth awaits the pleasure of God, and is kept in reserve unto destruction by fire, until the Day of Judgment, and the destruction of ungodly men. He is saying, "People! Remember, this is coming!"

II Peter 3:8-9 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

You may consider God slack in His promises, but one day with God is as a thousand years, which is why it seems so long, and His reason for taking this time is because of His love for each one of us and for all of mankind and He wants to save as many as possible. God is love.

II Peter 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

But wake up and understand that this day will come at a time when you least expect it. The heavens will pass away, and the elements (hydrogen, oxygen, and other combustible fuels), shall burn intensely and the earth and all of its works will melt burning up the incorrigible.

II Peter 3:11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, . . .

Based on this, how should we be living in this Laodicean era, the last church era in this end time?

II Peter 3:12-14 . . . looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? [We should be looking forward to and be aware of this time in our mind.] Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; . . .

Seeing that we all long for the return of Jesus Christ, and the new heavens and earth, whereby at last the world dwells in righteousness, we have to really work to be righteous, and not to let down in this end time promiscuous environment, that we might be found in peace with Him, without spot and blameless before Him glorying God..

II Peter 3:15 . . . and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you.

As we just read, Paul spoke and wrote on the same subject. Brethren, we upon who the ends of the earth shall come, and who live in this most difficult of times—times where urgency is almost non-existent regarding being faithful to God, His laws, loving our neighbor, having high morals, overcoming sin—must take steps to ensure we stand in this era.

"Consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you [about lukewarmness.]"

I hope this does not sound too trite, but where do we start? We have to start by asking ourselves, have we been putting God first in our lives? We do this by fasting and sincerely asking God to show us where we are falling short.

In doing so, we are responding to His knock that He might come in and dine with us, helping us to rise to the standard of His high calling despite the world around us. A question I would like to ask, and you can answer it yourself, "How many times have you fasted this last year?"

II Timothy 2:15-16 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.

This means you *personally* study. Study that you might reflect to whom you belong by the way you live—"rightly dividing the word of truth." This appears nowhere else in the Bible. In short, knowing what God wants for you and your family, and knowing how to apply God's Word in your everyday life—putting God's Word into practice.

Verse 16 gives a good warning to pay attention to. Stay away from wrong teachings and doctrines, because if one is not careful, it will take him or her right out of the church. The booklets used to be simple but now some of them are becoming much more technical.

Studying is one of those areas in our lives that takes our time. Going to work early, and coming home tired, or having to watch over little children all day, seems to justify not taking the time to study. Brethren, our personal study is absolutely essential to our salvation!

This society screams at us that there is so much to do—with your job, or family responsibilities—that you need all the rest and relaxation you can get, and you do this by watching television or being on the computer. The computer is a wonderful tool but what a time taker. Thus when we start to skip study, other things take its place, and we slowly slip away not realizing the danger we have placed ourselves in.

Perhaps you tend to not be great at study and feel this does not apply to you. That is just too bad, it is an absolute must. Some feel listening to sermon tapes will take the place of personal study, but I am here to tell you they will not. You have heard it stated that when you take the time to study, God will

talk to you personally in your study. Does that make your study important? You bet it does!

Does study require sacrifice on our part? It requires we make time daily for that study. Above all our activities, time must be set aside for prayer and study. I am sure some feel as long as I have my prayer in I have done what is needed, but that is not the case. We must set firm time aside to accomplish *both* daily. As we will see shortly, study is what builds one's foundation to stand on.

I know one minister, a high school principal, who rises at 3:30 every morning to ensure that he has his prayer and study done before he goes to work. Why is this so important? Because it is a part of the protection that we must have to stand at this end time.

From time to time, I think we all forget whom we are fighting against. We must remember that Satan hates us. In Ephesians 6, Paul has just shown the brethren their high calling and now he is going to show them who the fight is really against, and what to do to defend one's self.

Ephesians 6:10-11 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

He tells them—and us today—that we must be strong in the Lord. With the word 'wiles' it is almost as if Satan says, "if I can't get you one way, I'll get you another way." He schemes to get you and to take you out.

Ephesians 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

We must put on the armor of God to withstand the hate-filled force that is against us. And that force is Satan the Devil. Today with all our science, inventions, going to the moon, Mars, etcetera, I do not think we give much

consideration to Satan and his demons. And yet since Satan's rebellion, he has been determined to thwart God's plan to bring us into the Family of God. Brethren, he wants you dead.

We may watch Buffy the Vampire Slayer and other spirit being shows without considering that we have a demon world that hates us with a perfect hatred and wants every one of us *dead*.

In Matthew 6 we conclude the prayer outline Jesus gave with "And do not lead us into temptation [or difficult trial], but deliver us from the evil one." Jesus Christ told His disciples to pray that. He said you have to realize who you are fighting. Yet, many times I have talked to people and I have said, "Have you asked God to keep you from Satan the Devil?" God put that in His outline, He said do it. Satan is very real and we have to realize he will do all he can to destroy each and every one of us.

Paul confirms in verse 12 that we wrestle, and this term does not adequately give us the right picture. What we should understand is that we have to struggle and fight against these invisible spirits of wickedness

And the fight is against not just the run-of-the-mill, silly demons that move books and do other foolish things, but the rulers, or higher-up leadership that are assigned to destroy us. That is very real, brethren.

Albert Barnes lists a few of the forms the attacks will come in:

We will be urged to give in to our own evil weaknesses.

We will have to face the pride, ambition, and spirit of revenge that is in others that reflects Satan's kingdom. In other words we will have to deal with people in this world that have that attitude of revenge and hatred.

We will have to deal with evil customs, laws, opinions, employment, pleasures of this world which reflect Satan.

Also with error, superstition, and false doctrine. We can read over Revelation 12:9 and how Satan has deceived the whole world, and

it just seems to go by us and we do not realize. You bet he has. He has probably got some of his deception in us too and we will have to fight all other evil as well.

With all of this Paul says, we are to make war that we might stand and overcome our foes.

Ephesians 6:13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Our job then is to take the whole armor, or mind of God, that we will be able to withstand in the evil day. Having done all we could that we might stand.

Ephesians 6:14 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, . . .

It is interesting to note that the girdle was worn about the waist, and was used to tuck the robe into when action was to be taken. Truth is indeed what is needed when action is to be taken, and from John 17:17, we know that it is God's Word that is the truth. Thus when we need to step out and make decisions of every variety, it is God's truth we have to base them on.

When we put on the breastplate of righteous living, we truly protect ourselves from every type of unrighteous living that would bring us terrible trials and place us in harm's way. These are pretty basic.

Ephesians 6:15 . . . and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; . . .

Having one's feet shod with the gospel of peace simply means one's footing is firm in the knowledge of the gospel or good news of the coming Kingdom of God, and being peaceful and kind toward others.

Ephesians 6:16 . . . above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

Over all, have the shield of faith. The shield can be moved to protect the body from a blow coming from any direction, and thus faith in God and His wonderful promises can be trusted to protect one in any circumstance.

Again, we are fighting against Satan, and it is he who throws these fiery darts, and the shield of faith not only deflects the darts, but quenches them. (Revelation 12:9 "He deceives the whole world.")

Ephesians 6:17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; . . .

Could a soldier fight without the hope of victory? We too have the hope of victory through Jesus Christ that we will be in the Kingdom of God. All of us have this hope of salvation that shines through all the fog and clutter of this world. Paul is saying here to never let down in that hope, because it is true and sure.

Jesus Christ had the ability to confound His enemies with the sword of truth. He knew how to respond with His Father's Word. Though we may not always have chapter and verse on our tongue, we are to have principles, applications of God's Word, and the soundness of the mind of God in our thinking. This is why study is so important. This is the one offensive weapon that we have.

Ephesians 6:18 . . . praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.

Finally, to win this fight, we need to be in contact with our Father in meaningful prayer. New people often say they do not know what to pray about. You read the front page of the newspaper and that helps. You read of the continuing killing and terror in Iraq. I remember when I first came into the church and I promised God that I would give him half an hour a day. We are praying not just for ourselves, but with much perseverance and supplication for all the saints wherever they might be, in any of the groups. It is exceedingly important.

Brethren, I hope that we can see that putting on this armor and being able to stand at this time requires we are diligent in meaningful, daily study and prayer, and this should prompt meditation and fasting.

The Feast of Trumpets is an exciting holy day for the people of God, as it pictures the very possible return of Jesus Christ—of our being changed from flesh to spirit, and of peace to at last begin to engulf this tired war-torn world.

Therefore, God wants us to all be reminded and urged not to let down in this dangerous end time Laodicean environment. We are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, remembering that He is working in each of us that we might be a success in glorifying Him, thereby receiving the absolutely awesome future He has reserved and has in store for each of us.

I Thessalonians 5:1-11 But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.

Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

Do not let the world move you and position you to do this and that. Get rid of what urges you. This is what He called you for; this is what He is teaching you; this is why you are here to learn and to change. That is why we are to

follow the instructions of our General. We will live together with Him in a future that we cannot even begin to imagine. This is our job for the end time.

Therefore let us not sleep, but let us watch and be sober and fulfill the purpose that God set for us that we might be in His Kingdom.