

We Can Make It!

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I decided to begin here in Matthew 10 rather than in Matthew 24, but they say essentially the same thing. It is just abbreviated here.

Matthew 10:16-26 "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household! Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known."

Jesus gives essentially the same warning in the same kind of a context in Matthew 24, and each context reveals or describes an ever-increasing intensity of dangerous events that threaten to destroy our sense of security—events that will have the effect of an increasing fear that one will survive, and this triggers a sense of hopelessness. When hope is gone, people go into a state of depression and give up the battle even as they stay alive.

The state I am talking about will very frequently produce suicide. In a recent publication of the *National Institute of Mental Health*, it stated that for the year 2006, which is the last year for which there is a full measure of statistics, 33,300 people successfully committed suicide in the United States. They gave up the battle for life.

More women attempt suicide than men, but men are far more successful at completing the act. In fact, 4 ½ times more successful. Do you think women get depression because they have emotional problems? Men, you are worse statistically! Their paper stated that the suicide rate generally rises as people become older, and that the overall rates are highest for those who are 65 and above.

Look around the room. How many gray heads do you see? Do you think old people do not suffer from depression, and have the feeling that they want to commit suicide? They have been through it all. They have been through the wars, and now at 65 years of age, they think that people should have some kind of a feeling for them, taking care of them, and helping them through that time of disability in their life, and there is nobody to give them hope, and so they quit.

No age bracket, except the very youngest, is immune from the problem. They also reported that almost all of those who succeeded in committing suicide showed clear prior evidence of depression and other mental disorders, and often they carried with them also a substance abuse addiction.

I go into this because discouragement is a very real factor in everybody's life, but we of all people should be the least of mankind to be affected by it, but affected by it we are. It does occur to us as well, and indeed there are times when the most encouraging book that has ever been written seems to promote it.

Look with me in I Peter and see if this really encourages you.

I Peter 4:17-18 For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now "If the righteous

one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

Just by the skin of our teeth! If it were not for grace we would not be saved. How much skin? How thick is that layer of skin on our teeth?

We see God—the righteous Judge—who so hates sin that He must deal with it. We see evil everywhere in the world around us. We see sin in ourselves, and we know that God is judging, and conclude we will never make it if He judges us. A man as great as Paul said, "O wretched man that I am!" Can we measure up even to him?

And then we go to services, and there is a preacher up there, and he seemingly flails away at us with a litany of failures that we see also in ourselves, and we become even more discouraged as we evaluate ourselves. Now the minister may not mean it that way, but we *take* it that way because we see our problems so clearly etched by his words.

I mentioned Paul, so let us do a little bit of comparing with the apostle Paul in II Corinthians 11. Regarding these people in Corinth, he says:

II Corinthians 11:23-30 Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity.

Do you know why I went through that? Paul never gave up. Look at the load that man had laid on him by God, and yet we see no indication whatever in his writing that he resented it at all. "O, woe is me!" He just kept charging on. I am sure he had feelings, and I am sure his feelings were deep, but somehow or another, his concern about God and pleasing God was at such a level that he would grab hold of himself, turn himself around, and say, "Well, if I go to this city and they jump on me, and they rob me, and they beat me and leave me in the street for dead, so what? I am in the work of God. I have His Spirit, and He has promised me great and wonderful things, and regardless of what I have to go through, it is worth it to glorify God."

Most of us do not go through anything like he did. We go through it in type. We were not gifted to the level Paul was, and God gave him the things he needed in order to meet those problems, and he did. I do not mean to diminish our problems in any way, shape, or form, but brethren, because God loves us, our problems are at a level that we are able to handle. Can we understand that? With His help, though our problems might seem as big as Paul's to us, they can be met, and they can be conquered because He never gives us something that is over our head as long as we have His help. That is the key.

There are times, though, that the way seems impossible. So much seems to be against us from within ourselves, from the world, and from Satan, that it is very easy to become negative and to contemplate *spiritual* suicide.

Perhaps some have gotten to thinking like the man Abraham Lincoln told about in a story. The story he described was of a man on a journey who came to a wide river with rushing water that was slamming against sharp rocks sticking up out of the water. The man fretted, and paced back and forth on the bank, but he had to get to where he was going. It was almost sunset, and he knew he had to do it. "I've got to do it. If I don't get across now, I am going to miss that appointment, miss that opportunity." So in desperation he finally plunged into the river, and he found that the water never came above his knees.

Being encouraged, or being discouraged, are merely attitudes that are strongly and sometimes powerfully affected by our perception—that is, our

way of looking at things. It reminds me of a story of the three blind men touching an elephant. The one man touched the elephant on the trunk, and he thought it was a snake. That was his perception. Another one touched the elephant on the leg, and he said, "This surely is a tree." And then the third one touched the elephant on its side, and he said, "It is a wall." Each had a different perception of what he was involved with there, and all three views were to the same animal.

Let us look at verses 6 and 7 in Proverbs 23 just to sink you into what I am talking about here, and where it resides.

Proverbs 23:6-7 Do not eat the bread of a miser, nor desire his delicacies; for as he thinks in his heart, so is he. "Eat and drink!" he says to you, but his heart is not with you.

A problem resides here in our heart. One person may think a problem is a challenge meant to be overcome. To another, the same problem is an impossible burden unable to be surmounted. The spirit in which one meets a challenge is largely the foundation of his perception.

Sigmund Freud, who founded a school of psychology, thought that the basis of his conclusion was that mankind is driven by attitudes that we do not even have to be conscious of. Attitudes have their foundation in conceptions that are buried in our heart from previous experiences, and effort must be made to adjust our thinking.

How we think about ourselves and our relationship with God and man is going to go a long way in determining how we face the problems of this Way. How do you see yourself? Do you see yourself as a pilgrim or an exile? Is the glass half full, or is the glass half empty? Do you see yourself as a pilgrim on a great quest, meeting challenges along the way that you accept as a part of this way of life? Or do you see yourself as an exile, banished and fleeing for your life, stumbling from one overbearing problem to another?

Part of our discouragement might arrive from a question that all eventually ask themselves during times of discouragement. "Where, oh where, is God in

all of this?" The very fact that we even have this thought pass through our mind is evidence of the need for the trial that we are going through in order to correct this misconception.

I see no evidence that Paul asked that question in II Corinthians. "I am going through all these things in my travels all over the place. Where is God in all of this?" He accepted, he believed firmly, despite all the problems, that God was right there sharing the experience with him, and using that experience to shape Paul into what He wanted Paul to be when he came out the other end of the problem.

I want you to consider a forerunner of Paul for a while here, and his name is Jacob. We are going to go back to Genesis 27. We all know at least a bit about Jacob's life. He did not start out as one of the good guys, did he?

Genesis 27:41-43 So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, "The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then I will kill my brother Jacob." And the words of Esau her older son were told to Rebekah. So she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said to him, "Surely your brother Esau comforts himself concerning you by intending to kill you. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice: arise, flee to my brother Laban in Haran.

Drop down to chapter 28. Jacob is now fleeing for his life. He is now an exile.

Genesis 28:10-15 Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: "I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north

and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."

Here is Jacob fleeing for his life. He was exiled from his family, but God communicated to him that He was with him. The communication played a major role in turning Jacob from an exile to a pilgrim, and the change was merely a matter of his perception of what was going on. Nothing changed in the blink of an eye. He was still fleeing for his life. He still had a very uncertain future before him. He knew in general where he was going to, but he did not know what it was going to be like when he got there, and he did not know what was going to happen on the journey there, or even after he got to where he was going what he was going to do.

The ladder in this vision was a symbol of real and uninterrupted fellowship between God and His people on earth. Remember that angels are ministering spirits sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation. There is tremendous encouragement here. It was as though God was saying, "Look, you can't see Me, but I can see you, and I am with you."

Jacob was far from perfect, and many, many difficult trials lay ahead. He needed to know that God was with him in a completely unbroken way. That is why the ladder stayed in place, and that is why the angels were moving up and down it. There was a constant stream. God was picturing to Jacob a constant stream of help that was flowing from heaven above to earth below, and right to Jacob. What a support that can be for you and me! Regardless of the difficulties we are going through, remember that Jesus Christ said to you and me, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

God gave that vision to Jacob, and then God made sure that vision was communicated to you and me in this book. That vision applies to you and me every bit as much as it did to Jacob though several thousand years ago. That ladder, as it were, is still there, and the communication God gives through His angels, and His angels back to Him about what is going on in our life, is still alive and connected.

Turn with me now to Proverbs 29, and we will get another piece of this picture that we so very much need to have.

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

Now this is how the *Living Bible* translates this verse, because this verse suggests a vital element to our life. "Where there is ignorance of God, the people run wild; but what a wonderful thing it is for a nation to know and to keep His laws."

Even here the *Living Bible* goes a little bit too far in this picture. "Run wild" does not necessarily mean people are going to be running around like a bunch of screaming banshees. What it does mean is that people without a true knowledge of God are aimless about life's purpose. They have no direction to their life other than things that are physically oriented.

They can accomplish great things, as it were, apart from God because they have direction in their life, but their direction in life has nothing to do with the Kingdom of God. It has everything to do with what is in their mind and heart, and those things most of the time are purely physical. They are leading spiritually directionless lives. That is what that verse is telling us.

People who do not have the revelation of God lead directionless lives spiritually. And so what are they doing? They are aimlessly drifting through life with no overriding spiritual purpose to accomplish. Because they do not have that kind of revelation God gave to Jacob, it is sort of like trying to get somewhere you have never been before without a road map. What do you do? You wander around and hope you come to the road you need to turn on. Or, even worst still, you are given a map by a person you feel you can trust, and it contains wrong directions. That is what is happening in the world left and right by churches that claim to be Christian, and are not. People trust them, but they are being given a message that is not a real revelation of God.

Jacob was at that point. He was not only a wanderer, but he was a guilt-burdened and remorseful one as well. He did not deserve a vision, but God in His mercy gave Him one, and He has given it to you and me as well.

One of the things we are learning as we continue in this way of life is that we must do our part, and there is very much we can do to help ourselves along the way so that we do not become discouraged and do not contemplate committing spiritual suicide by giving up. Perception is determined by what one permits one to think upon. So as we continue in this sermon, I want to give you some positive, selfless reasons we should be thinking on as to why we should strive to meet the challenges God permits or actually directs into our lives. I want to give you direction so that you will not be wandering aimlessly, discouraged at every turn of events, feeling that our lives are careening out of control.

We made a covenant with God, and a covenant has two sides. There is God's, and there is ours. God never lies. Do not ever let that slip from your mind. *God never lies*. The flipside of this is, He never fails. The problem is with us. He has not forgotten us. He is aware of what we are going through, but He is patient and He is persevering. If He does not seemingly come to our aid, the very fact that He has not come to our aid is for our good. He wants to see if we are going to meet the challenge.

You can remember what He said there in Deuteronomy 8, that He *gave* the Israelites trials out there in the wilderness so that people would learn that "man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds forth from the mouth of God." That is where life is. What does God say? This is what we must think on. God never lies. God never fails. The problems are with us.

What I am going to give you are not quick-fix solutions, and they are given to provide us with some overall guidance in order to keep us on track.

Point One: In order to keep on keeping on, we must really desire to expand the rule of God in our individual lives—ours, our neighbor's, whatever. It is a way that will direct us toward laying down our lives for our friend.

Romans 1:16-17 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for

the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

The key word-phrase there for us is, "the **gospel** is the power of God, for in it the righteousness of God is revealed."

I Corinthians 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

I Corinthians 1:24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

In all of those verses "**power**" is what is emphasized.

The term "salvation" can be defined in a number of ways. It can be referred to correctly as "deliverance to safety" or "rescue from bondage." In actual individual application, it is "the restoration of one's mind to soundness." That is the one I like. I do not know whether you understand II Timothy 1:6-7.

II Timothy 1:6-7 Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

The spirit that God has given to us is the spirit of a sound mind. Without directly saying it, if we do not have the Spirit of God, we are, to some degree *insane*, and salvation is the restoration of one's mind to soundness so that we think like God thinks.

Paul had a fervent desire to preach, because he knew from personal experience the power of the good news working in those who believe. It produced transformed lives.

In this context, Paul does not say it is a message *about* the power of God. He says "the **gospel** is the power of God." The gospel, brethren, is nothing but

words, and John 6:63 tells us that words are spirit. Words are the symbols we use to represent other things. Words are what we use to think and make choices with. Words inform, encourage, activate, restrain, or stop one entirely. Perhaps to greatly simplify, the gospel might be defined as "the teaching of a way of life in which one deliberately chooses to submit to the rule of God." It has nothing to do with feelings at that point.

I am going to read something to you from a book titled *The Knowledge of the Holy*, written by A. W. Tozer. Almost any book you get written by Tozer is going to be pretty good. He was a preacher in the Christian Missionary Alliance Church. If you read of his life, in some way you would think he was a strange bird because he spent so much time thinking about God, thinking about prayer, meditating in God's Word, and writing down his thoughts. Now listen to what Tozer said:

Yet much as we deplore the lack of stability in our life in all earthly things, in a fallen world such as this, the very ability to change is a golden treasure, a gift from God of such fabulous worth as to call for constant thanksgiving. For human beings, the whole possibility of redemption lies in their ability to change. To move across from one sort of person to another is the essence of repentance. The liar becomes truthful. The thief becomes honest. The lurid, pure. The proud, humble. The whole moral texture of the life is altered. The thoughts, the desires, the affections are transformed, and the man is no longer what he had been before. So radical is this change that the apostle calls the man that used to be "the old man," and that man is now the "new" man, which is renewed in the knowledge after the image of Him who created him; and yet the change is deeper and more basic than any external acts can reveal, for it includes also the reception of life and of a higher quality. The old man, even at his best, possesses only the life of Adam. The new man has the life of God.

That is what we are aiming for. The seed is already in us. That seed is words that are arranged in such a pattern so as to incite our loyalty to what is being taught to us, and to incite us to put forth the effort to go in the direction God wants. That is what words do. They impel. They move. They compel, if we only will accept them.

God did not preach a sermon to Jacob there. He gave him a vision. I am preaching a sermon to you because that is the means by which He is doing things today. We do not see much in the way of visions. They are going to come a little bit later, but now, because we already have the benefit of what God gave to Jacob, He gives us sermons, and God hopes we take those sermons to heart and make use of them.

From the Garden of Eden, Satan has been challenging that concept Paul gives us in Romans and in I Corinthians. That concept and his arguments are sometimes obvious. Sometimes they are subtle. Sometimes they are devious, but they almost always follow the same basic line that one can have a wonderful reward now without cost if one just goes Satan's way. "Oh, forget about God. Go my way, and the reward will come immediately." Brethren, *our reward comes later.*

We work, as it were, and yield ourselves to God for the future out of hope and out of faith in His Word. We can have all of these wonderful things now without cost—if we just go Satan's way. Remember what Satan said to Adam and Eve. "You shall not surely die," and he says this to this day to all who will listen. But look at the results. Even the secular records tell us the experience of man is strewn with the wreckage of things gone wrong. God says it so simply, that Jesus Christ came to relieve, to deliver those, who through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

That is, we spend our lives always trying to dodge the bullet of responsibility. Human nature keeps forcing us to act and react by jumping the wrong way both before and after the click.

It is interesting that men apart from God have seen the problem, but how can the endless cycle of pain, anxiety, violence, and death be broken? Men formulate the philosophies which undergird the cultures of this world, but none of them has the power to work. Their words just do not have it because the wrong spirit is in those words.

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Why? Because the righteousness of God is revealed in them. Righteousness is right doing. The gospel is power because it offers truth not found in any of the philosophies

or in the religions of this world. The truth about this creation, about man's purpose, forgiveness, and the hope for all of mankind is greater than anything that man in his wildest dreams could imagine.

God gives us truth about time; truth that opens the way to a relationship with God; truth that gives man choices to think over and activate; truth that opens the way to God's grace and gifts, and to enable one to do His will. All of this is given so that we can fulfill our part of the covenant.

Did you ever stop to think of it, that virtually every one of God's promises is *conditional*? Do we really believe that we have the truth, and if used can break our bondage from the past—truth that through the relationship established with God we can apprehend what we are apprehended for, as Paul said?

Confidence and hope, and not discouragement, come from the knowledge that is contained in the gospel. God is offering deliverance from sickness, moral, mental, emotional and physical and spiritual rescue from the fear of danger, and freedom from the bondage of sin and death. That is something to glory in, in the right way. But that is not the way it is in the world right now. This world is in an appalling condition, and there is a tendency in us to detach ourselves from it, or allow ourselves to be hardened to it.

God tells us to be alert. Why? Because it helps us to be headed in the right direction in the right attitude. Can we have empathy for what is happening in the world, what is happening that we have been separated from by the power of the gospel? Empathy is described as "having your pain in my heart."

The world is mostly made up of people who are totally ignorant as to what is going on. There are those who are somewhat aware, but they choose to ignore it. Then there are those who are aware, and they have nowhere to turn. They feel they are trapped. Now we must learn to project ourselves into *their* frustrating situation, and that I know is difficult to do because we think too much of ourselves. We take too much time to think about trials, of poverty, disease, starvation, deformity, deception, murder, rape, incest, racism. All of these things are going on around us all the time, and those people have to

carry on with their lives without having the power of the gospel to give them understanding to move them in the right direction. They just have to put up with it without hope of release.

God has called us to prepare to become kings and priests in His Kingdom in order to bring about a world of peace, because we have removed the occasions for war so that none is afraid. We are going to fill this earth with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea. Think on this, because it is true: Do you really want to restore this earth to the way it was at the beginning before Adam and Eve sinned?

Point Two: We also have to have the desire to restore peace to the creation.

Despite 6,000 years of man's thoughtless destructive efforts, there are still some places of beauty left—places that give one a sense of serenity and well-being, a feeling of awe for God's creative activity, and being at one with God and His purpose. But often one must travel far to find them.

Brethren, I can remember the very first time I saw the Grand Canyon. It was in 1968. Evelyn, my family, and I were driving to California. I was going there to attend Ambassador College for a year. On the way there, we made a right-hand turn, drove a hundred miles or so to the rim of the Grand Canyon. I can remember very well getting out of my car, walking out onto the observation deck and looking at that thing. Wow! What a feeling! What creativity! What power! It was so quiet you could almost hear a pin drop because everybody else was quiet too. It was so stunning. Those places are there. How would you like the whole world to be like that, just awesome in its beauty, and you did it, along with others?

Romans 8:19-22 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

Hebrews 1:10-12 And: "YOU, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not fail."

Paul, figuratively, personified the creation in this context here in Romans 8. Nature is in a state of degenerating unrest. When we add to this Hebrews 1: 10-12, what we see there is a very simple stating of the second law of thermodynamics. That law essentially says that everything is disintegrating. It is in a state of deterioration. God remains unchanged, but what He made physical is degenerating as we approach the end, and it has been degenerating, as it were, from at least the time of Adam and Eve's sin. It is not like it used to be, and it is going to be worse before the end comes to pass. And then when the end comes, God is going to use His family to begin to restore it to the glory that it had before when He first made it. That is going to be part of our job. That is why I said we are going to be used to restore it to the beauty that it had.

We live in a deeply troubled deteriorating and dying world where things have gone radically wrong. We live in a world that glorifies ugliness. We live in a world that is filled with ugly and vile cities. We hear destructive ugliness in what we call music, and even at times in art and in architecture. We live in a world of disharmony in which the intent seems to be keeping people anxious and discontented.

Mankind has sinned deliberately, but the creation had to bear much of the penalty imposed on it. "Cursed is the ground for your sake," God said to Adam, and brethren, it is certainly reflected in nature. The contagion of our evil has spread beyond the confines of our lives and has infected the whole of creation. Mankind must learn that we cannot neatly divide ourselves away from the rest of God's creation as if what we do does not matter.

Have you ever seen the sides of our roads? They are strewn all over the place from New York City to Los Angeles with burned out cigarette butts, chewing gum wrappers, McDonald's wrappers, Burger King wrappers, and you name it. It is there. That is the way mankind treats God's beautiful home that He created for us. I hope you are not doing any of those things.

There is a unity in God's creation in which each and every one of us bears a huge responsibility, because a disaster in one part impacts to some degree, large or small, on all. And even as our body is one unit consisting of many individual parts, so is the entire creation.

Revelation 11:18 The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged,

People conclude by observing nature that God is cruel. They get angry at Him because of the way things are. God is most certainly not cruel! God did not cut down all the trees. God did not cover the land with concrete. God did not use strip-mining techniques that scar the earth and pollute the water. God did not make acid rain. People observe the law of the jungle in the viciousness of lions and tigers, but it was not that way in the beginning when God ruled. The way things are regarding animals' nature ought to testify of Satan's nature—the nature he has shared with us.

In Romans 8 it shows that the rest of creation is bound together with man's destiny. When mankind's deliverance begins, nature's deliverance will begin too, and it will experience a rebirth from bondage to ugliness into glorious beauty. The entire world—even nature—is waiting for us to help put it at peace. Are you willing to think about that and to be used of God to do such a beautiful act? That has to be part of our thinking.

Let me give another suggestion to you as to why you should strive to overcome and grow and be in the Kingdom of God.

Point Three: We owe it to our loved ones.

It is becoming ever more obvious that it is not just for ourselves that we have been called into this Way. God has called us to prepare to become kings and priests in His Kingdom in order to bring about a world of peace because we have removed the occasion for war that has made people afraid. But all too often we think of this in a vague general way.

Our calling is also in behalf of the unconverted. But what about the unconverted *closest* to us? There is something about family that makes it

special above all other relationships. Within it there is an acceptance of what we are, and the way we are that makes us feel close and also responsible. Do you not want to live eternally with those you love, like your unconverted husband, or your unconverted wife, and your children who are not yet called at this time?

We started out in Matthew 10, but we did not read these verses.

Matthew 10:34-36 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.'"

All too frequently this is the way that it is now. One thing that will help us is this: That was God's choice. That was something that is out of our hand. It is God who sets up this condition by calling one and not the other. If He did it that way, then it must be good for all concerned, because He is a God of love. But brethren, it does create pressures for us to deal with, and all too frequently we do not act or react to that unconverted person or persons in a godly manner, and so the family environment has much accusation and frustration leading to such bitterness that one wonders whether there will ever be forgiveness.

Now notice the instruction in this parable in Luke 16.

Luke 16:25-27 But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.' "Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's [Abraham's] house.'

The time in this parable, in this context, is the third resurrection, and the man was concerned about his unconverted relatives, but it was too late. Abraham said to him, "Can't do that."

Now, what would you feel like if it were the other way around, and those of your relatives who are unconverted are in the Kingdom, and you are the one who came up in the third resurrection? They made it, and you did not. A sad state, but that is what he is describing here. What would you feel like when everything was over and you did not make it because you allowed them to wear away at you, and you could not share eternity with them? So they are in, and you are out, because for whatever reason, you gave up. You committed *spiritual suicide*.

The parable here shows the rich man as indolent and self-indulgent, and interestingly, the parable shows that he did not do anything against Lazarus while they were both alive. He simply did nothing. It was what the rich man did *not* do that earned him eternal death.

God has given us a ministry of reconciliation, as it says in II Corinthians 5, and we need to strive to do it. Whether they accept it or not does not matter right now. We are still to strive to be reconciled to them. Did not Jesus say in Matthew 5 that it is the peacemakers who shall be called the sons of God? Peacemaking is accomplished, brethren, by simply doing the right thing. God is not guaranteeing that peace will break out right then, but because we are the ones that are trying to *make* peace, we make it, and maybe they do too later on.

This is not rocket science, brethren. It is not something that is complex. We must obey when our time comes, and they must submit to God and obey when their time comes, and so the word here is to fight the good fight of faith for *them too* simply by doing the right thing.

Point Four: We do not want to let God down.

Back to Romans 8 once again. There was something in verse 19 that we overlooked before, but this time we are going to look at it.

Romans 8:19-20 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope.

Did you know that? God has hope too, and with that hope He is pulling for us to do the things we need to do. God's hope is not a vague thought that somehow He may not be able to save us because our salvation is completely in our weak hands and pretty much out of His influence. No. His hope is that with His very able help, we are going to finish the race. His hope is that while we are running we will do our best under the circumstances. Hope is a pleasant expectation of something good, yet future.

Notice what God says in Psalm 78. Actually He does not say too much here in this context, but the feeling is there that He has, that He is looking forward to.

Psalm 78:38-39 But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath; for He remembered that they were but flesh, a breath that passes away and does not come again.

Drop down now to verse 65, because this story goes on. Here we find God ready to send Jesus Christ.

Psalm 78:65-66 Then the Lord awoke as from sleep, like a mighty man who shouts because of wine. And He beat back His enemies; He put them to a perpetual reproach.

If we would go through this whole psalm, we would see that God's hope is expressed in the fact that He wants to intervene, and it is only His love that keeps Him from intervening too soon. The metaphor that is used in verse 65 shows one with a pent up, uninhibited emotion. In verse 65 it is just like He is saying, "Whoopee! The time has come, and here I go to rescue these people."

All the while, He is hoping that we will perform our responsibilities to Him. That is where His hope is. Not that He cannot do it, but He is hoping that *we* will do it so that we will grow to be like Christ, and along the way He gives us every bit of help that He can possibly give us at this time.

And with God, if you have tried your best, even though you did not finish first, you have won. And if you endure to the end, you have won.

Look at Paul's example in I Corinthians 9. Paul made such strong effort to make sure that he upheld his part in the covenant.

I Corinthians 9:24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it

Paul is not saying that we have to finish first. He is saying that we need to go all out. That is what God is hoping, that we will go all out. He will add what we lack.

I Corinthians 9:25-27 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Brethren, do not finish before the race is through. God is pulling for us. Do not let Him down. He says He will never leave nor forsake us, and such assurance from Him deserves the best from us.

I have only been able to get through 4 of 7 points, but that is another sermon. But I will rehearse them, because I feel these are essential to our understanding so that we do not allow discouragement to overcome us, but that we just keep right on going.

First, we should want to be in God's Kingdom in order to expand the rule of God. What He has shown us already ought to be enough to impress our mind to go on despite all that is before us.

The second one is that we should want to restore peace to the creation—peace and beauty for what God made so beautiful for us, and then to be used in working and restoring it.

The third one is that we owe it to our loved ones, especially those who are unconverted now, and we should strive to be peacemakers, not that there is going to be peace break out necessarily, but because we have done what God says to do in order that peace might not occur until the Kingdom of God or beyond in the second resurrection, but there it will be.

Number four is that we owe it to God. Do not let Him down. He is our Father. He is pulling for us, and He will do everything that He can do within the framework of where we are at this place. He will give us all the help we need. He will never forsake us. He wants us to respond to Him according to what He has said.

Again, the Feast of Tabernacles is a time of repentance, a time of change, a time of resetting of our goals in life and the dedication of ourselves to what God is accomplishing in us.