

## The Handwriting Is On The Wall (2010)

Your Perception is Your Reality

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As has been my pattern for quite a number of years, I began the Feast of Tabernacles with what I had titled a "Handwriting On The Wall" sermon. The idiom indicates a notification usually in the form of some sort of a sense of danger, that if we are alert to it, we will be able to take advantage of it. In other words, given an understanding of what is going to happen, we then make the right movements in order either to protect ourselves or take advantage of it in another way.

As we begin this Feast of Tabernacles I am going to address a subject that is foundational, but that is in no way elementary to our conduct in our life in preparation for the Kingdom of God. Elementary things are those aspects of life we tend to leave behind as we mature. The Apostle Paul said in I Corinthians 13:11:

**I Corinthians 13:11** When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

Paul writes of a change all of us are aware of, and that is, as we mature, our outlook, our understanding, and our perception of things change. A simple example might be our perception of the elementary school building that we went to as a child. As a child, the building seemed large and imposing, but viewing it maybe twenty years later as an adult, the perspective of the building is that it is nondescript and small. Well, why? It is because of a multitude of experiences we had in between, past and present; it has altered our judgment.

In terms of perspective, it is though we are looking at it through different eyes. But the reality is nothing has really changed except our ability to judge.

"Elementary" means "dealing with or arising from the simplest facts of a subject." Its synonyms are "rudimentary" and "simple." The subject for this evening's sermon is basic to the process of preparation for the Kingdom of God.

Perceiving reality is sometimes difficult, and indeed it is often very difficult and time-consuming, perhaps requiring a large number of changes of mind that require a great deal of diligence to sort out reality to proper understanding. Perceiving reality requires

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These are very familiar Scriptures in John 8:30-32. Let us look at it in this light.

**John 8:30-32** As He spoke these words, many believed in Him. Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

My subject involves the search for truth. The Greek term underlying the English word "truth" here is *aletheia*. It is a noun, and as it is used here it indicates "the reality that lies at the basis of an appearance." That last word is especially important. It indicates the reality that lies at the basis of an appearance. How something appears to us may not be true, because our judgment is askew in some way. We may be sincere, but reality is often different from what we see.

Look at verse 31, where Jesus has dogmatically stated that abiding in, or continuing in His word, is essential to being a disciple. "Abide" is a word we do not use very much anymore, but it means "to remain in place." It means "to continue on as you are without breaking rank." Feed that definition into "abiding in the truth." In practical application to life, He means that we cannot be all over the place in regard to *finding* truth, repenting when necessary, and then using truth.

There are all kinds of truths. There are truths about building construction and maintaining good health. There are truths about many areas of science, truths about geography and history, but Jesus is talking about the truths that pertain to God. His concern is truths about spirituality and morality; truths about having a great marriage and childrearing truths; truths about pride and humility; truths about ourselves; truths that are indeed reality. In other words, truths about these things make life abundant and fulfilling.

If we look at this correctly, we will understand that this search for truth is a great, great quest. But it also is one that is fraught with certain pitfalls, because with 6,000 years of mankind's history to provide information, there are many paths in this search. There are many offshoots that go nowhere. Some of them are rather harmless, but others are downright destructive to God's purpose.

The harmless ones fill our minds with things that indeed might be interesting, and along the way may even help to round out our personality, but in the end, much of it is just

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useless information. An example might be: Americans have gone bonkers over entertainment. Maybe it has always been that way, but now it just seems to be in our face. It is available at every turn, in every direction. Having fun seems to be for many the very purpose of life. People follow the lives and feats of entertainment figures with great zeal, gathering information about them. They want to know their truths.

In the overall picture, entertainment has some value as a brief diversion, but in comparison to, and of greater importance to other things, its value is almost negligible. Are you going to say to God, "Well, I watched such and such a comedian, and I laughed my heart out"? He is going to say, "What has that to do with the Kingdom of God? How did that prepare you to be a king and a priest?" Can you really follow Jesus Christ as laughing all the time and having a lot of fun?

Is not life serious? Is it not something we want to spend our time looking for things that are really going to be of great value to our glorifying God? A godly life, brethren, is busy. It is very important, and we have to discipline ourselves to stay on track for the most important things, because time *is* running out for all of us, and that, brethren, is a reality despite appearances.

Peter has a prophecy that says scoffers are going to come in at the last day saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?" They do not believe that time is really running out. It does not have application to them. "Let's have another drink!" "Let's have fun!" We do not want to fall into that trap and just waste our life away because time is running out.

In God's word we are strongly advised to "seek the Lord while He may be found." He is not going anywhere, but we might be going to our grave very shortly. Time *is* running out, and God expects us to make the best use of that time. "Seeking the Lord while He may be found" is quite a challenge because there is so much competition regarding what many of the truths of God actually are. These competing truths are fed into our minds from the time we are born.

The main supplier of this information is our parents, and then our extended family, a church (if we attended one) while we were growing up, the schools we went to, the peers we associated with, the neighborhood that we were in, the community and the nation and our fellow employees when we finally had a place to work. And all this while, slowly but surely, this backlog of information becomes the basis for the judgments in life. It sets our perspective on the world and the general way that we look at things in particular areas of life. It is right here that this mass of information we have been gathering since birth becomes very important.

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As I was pastoring the Glendale and North Hollywood congregations in the late 1980s, we had a graduate Spokesmen's Club that had quite a number of very fine speakers as members. These men had already attained graduation from the regular Spokesmen's Club, and some of them were pretty advanced in their ability to communicate. One of the younger men, who was in his late twenties and was quite skilled with a camera, gave a speech on "perspective."

When we look at a scene, our brain automatically makes adjustments to what we are looking at, so we see it in three-dimensions, and interpret that scene with as few distortions as possible. However, that is not the way with the camera's eye. The camera sees and captures the picture without the brain automatically adjusting to eliminate distortion.

The young man used pictures as props of the same building taken from somewhat different angles in relation to the camera. Now simply by changing the camera's position in relation to the building, as he took the pictures he was able to make the building appear much taller than it actually was, or shorter as well; and he could elongate it so that it appeared much wider than reality would actually show. Appearance and reality. He could enhance one aspect, or diminish the visual impact of another. His subject was "Perspective." His purpose in this particular speech was to teach us how a skilled marketer could make a product appear more attractive simply by the clever use of cameras. It could be used to influence a certain age group within a population, and this usage could, at the very least, be a mild form of deception.

"Perspective" is defined by my *American Heritage College Dictionary* as "the technique of representing three-dimensional objects and depth relationships on a two-dimensional surface." It is also defined as a "view" or "vista," and also the definition having the most bearing on this sermon—"a mental view or outlook."

There is a second word—a word that shares the usage of the third definition I just gave you for "perspective." That is, a mental view or outlook, but this term has more meaningful consequences to our understanding, our decision-making, and therefore our preparations for the Kingdom of God. That word is "perception." These two words sound almost alike in some contexts, and in some contexts they come close to *meaning* the same, but they are somewhat different.

"Perception" is the term having more to do with making a judgment as to the *meaning* of an appearance. Its definition is, again from the *American Heritage College Dictionary*, "any insight, knowledge, or intuitive judgment arrived at as by perceiving."

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I am sure that you all have heard the expression "perception is reality." A perception is your point of view on any given subject. "This is the way I see it" judgment. Perception has everything to do with decision-making, because that is where perceptions are most frequently used.

Perceptions are based and created within one's own life experiences, and everybody's life experiences are to some degree unique to each one, and these perceptions are what we draw on to determine attitudes and conduct; but—and this is a major point—whether your perception is actually reality can be another thing altogether. This is very important, because unless we are willing to change our perceptions whenever we are confronted with truth, we will never repent. We will never change. We will not grow, and so we have to have room in our mind to be willing to change the way we look at things. This is especially important to us personally, or in making decisions about somebody else's character or way of life. We can destroy somebody with a wrong perception.

Reality is the state of things as they actually are. Remember that truth Jesus spoke of in John 8:31-32. That is reality He is talking about there. Not the way something may appear, but what sets us free is reality, and we have got to be able, as best we possibly can, to perceive it, to see it, and use it.

People may have very strong opinions that their perception of something is reality, but the reality may be that they are totally wrong; and the value of their perception is valid only if their perception is indeed reality. Because of this, one philosophical type (I am talking about a human who was kind of a philosophical type) concluded that because so many peoples' perceptions are really and truly not reality, the phrase should be corrected, restated as, "*your* perception is *your* reality." So in order for a person's perception to be a reality, perception has to square with truth. This is why Jesus said if you abide in truth (reality), you are going to be set free. This is what we are aiming for in life. Don't you really want to be free? You do.

We are experiencing something in this country that is unprecedented in its history, where we see liberties we have enjoyed since 1776 or 1789 (whatever you want to count it from) are being taken away from us left and right by a government that does not look at things, does not have the same perception about things, as the great vast majority of Americans look at things. So we have a Tea Party arising. Who knows where that is going to go, but it is interesting.

A person's perceptions are formed from the mix of what he believes, and what a person believes gradually accumulates throughout life from the multitude of experiences that he

The Handwriting Is On the Wall (2010) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

has had. This is why people from different parts of the country have different perceptions about things. This can have grave consequences in regard to religion.

Let us look at a Scripture that I know you can say by heart, but let us look at it so we know it is in the Bible. Turn to Revelation 12:9, as we launch into another section of this sermon, but carrying this thought through.

**Revelation 12:9** So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

He has deceived the whole world. If a person is deceived, he does not know it. If he is told the truth, and he makes a change, he is no longer deceived. But as long as he still continues to hold to the deceit he believes in, he is still deceived. So he goes on in his life with perceptions regarding salvation—we are talking about religion now—feeling very comfortable about what he believes and arguing strongly from his point of view with others that he is correct in his beliefs.

Let us use a simple clear illustration. In the most common pictures one sees in artists' conception of what Jesus looked like, He is pictured as being dark brown, with long hair, handsome, and young. They got that part right. He is young. God purposely hid what Jesus looked like so that people would not focus on anything physical. He wants us concentrated on the spiritual truth that Jesus said and did. But to most of the people in the world, because they are deceived, what God says does not matter, and they are not about to change their perception.

Let us look at a few of the truths regarding what Jesus did or did not look like. First of all, God said that Jesus had no beauty that we should desire Him. Second, for a man to have long hair is a shame. Jesus said He always did what pleased the Father, so we know that He would not permit Himself to have long hair. And third, Jews, as Israelites, can have black hair, blonde hair, red hair, different colored eyes; thus a person can be totally misguided regarding Jesus' appearance, but that does not guide his perceptions if he is deceived.

Let us look at a number of Scriptures, and I want to show you how frequently this popped up in Jesus' life ministry. Let us go to John 2:19-20. This occurred very early in Jesus' ministry.

**John 2:19-20** Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in

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three days I will raise it up." Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"

The Jews' perception was totally wrong regarding what Jesus said here and what He meant. But three and one-half years later they had not changed their perception, and so they used His statement, which they misperceived, as proof of His supposed blasphemy when He was on trial for His life.

In John 3, within the first twelve verses, Nicodemus got the wrong impression at least three times during that brief period of instruction.

When we move into John, chapter 4, the Samaritan woman's perception of Jesus' declaration about water that she was getting out of the well was entirely wrong. She misperceived it.

Also in John 4, Jesus' disciples got the wrong perception when He said that He had food to eat of which they did not know.

In John 6, the people did not perceive Jesus' teaching regarding eating His flesh and drinking His blood. They got up and left Him. It was a hard saying. There was no room in their mind for the understanding that He meant exactly what He was saying because they did not look at it in the right way.

In those brief four chapters everybody got the wrong impression from what Jesus said and what were they guided by? They were guided by their life's experiences from the past, and they reached the conclusion that they had the truth. They were totally wrong, but they believed they were right.

Let us turn to one in Matthew 16 where Jesus directly asked a question in regard to this.

**Matthew 16:13-17** When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" ["What is their perception of Me?"] So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

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God was able to change the perceptions of those He called. They still could have exercised their will, as Judas no doubt did, and rejected it. But they accepted, and they repented regarding their views about the Messiah.

Let us turn to Luke 17, verses 20 and 21. This hits home a little bit for us.

**Luke 17:20-21** Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you [or among you, or in your midst]."

The Pharisees' perception of the Messiah's coming was also wrong because they overlooked or were blind to the fact that the Messiah would come first as the Lamb of God who would die for the sins of the world, and then come a second time as the Ruler. Their perception would not accept Jesus as the Lamb of God. But they believed very strongly that they had the truth; their perception was misleading them.

This should give us a pretty good idea of why that philosophical type said that the idiom should be restated as "your perception is *your* reality." It is so easy for anyone's perception to be wrong unless it is backed with absolute truth.

The ease of getting or coming to a wrong perception can be downright destructive, dangerous to life and limb.

Turn with me to the book of Acts, chapter 7, verses 55 through 58. This is the murder of Stephen.

**Acts 7:55-58** But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

**Acts 8:3** As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.



The Handwriting Is On the Wall (2010) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

In that little incident, Stephen's perception was truth. He *did* see what he saw in heaven. The others who could not see the truth killed him, because their perception did not fit his reality. Their perception was totally wrong.

Paul was undoubtedly a man of exceptional intelligence. He had been given as fine of an education as a young Jew could be given. His perceptions of Jesus and the Christian religion were totally, violently wrong, until God changed his mind and he accepted a *new* reality.

Turn now to John 16, verses 1 through 3. Jesus spoke these words on the last night of His life.

**John 16:1-3** These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me.

The idea for this sermon began niggling at my mind as I was reading a book titled "Under the Banner of Heaven" by Jon Krakauer. It was published in 2006. It is a true story of the murder of a young woman killed in 1984 by her own brothers-in-law, who were fanatically-devoted members of the fundamentalist wing of the Mormon church.

She, too, had been a member, but was growing increasingly critical of its truly strange beliefs and ways. It was looking to the family as though she might pull her husband, who was a brother of the two killers of her, as well. One of the brothers-in-law was considered to be a prophet by the family.

They put up with her for awhile, but it was undoubtedly burning within their minds, especially of the prophet, who was the oldest of the brothers. One day he announced to the other brother-in-law that an order had come from God that they were to kill her, and they did. They also killed her infant daughter, who was still in a crib, maybe one and a half to two years old. They killed her and the daughter as cold-bloodedly as if they were killing a pig.

They were apprehended by the Utah police within a few days. The prophet was guilty. He knew it. He really did not even want a trial. The prophet chose to be executed by firing squad. The younger man—the one who actually did the killings—methodically and with deliberate calmness sliced them into pieces with a knife. He was not given the

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death penalty. He escaped on a technicality of some kind. He maintained all the way through the trial, and to this very day—at least by 2006 when the book was published and the author, Jon Krakauer, talked to him in prison—that he had absolutely no qualms about doing what he did, and would do it again, because to him his perception was that he had received a message from God, and it was not in him to turn aside from that message. He would not dare disobey that command.

As I said earlier in this message, perceptions are formed from past experiences, and they accumulate as the years and experiences go by and become part of our memories. Once this fact is known about how these accumulate, it becomes reasonably easy to understand why Islamic terrorists can so cold-bloodedly kill the innocent victims of their perception, because from childhood they are gradually made to perceive others as infidels *deserving* to be killed, and to do so earns them a great reward. Perceptions create biases that are very difficult, almost impossible to change, regardless of whether they are in the area of politics, religion, or science. Satan has indeed done his work well in setting mankind up to be enemies of God and fellowman directly and indirectly through the world.

Let us go back to John 3:3, to Jesus' instruction to Nicodemus.

**John 3:3** Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

That word "see" comes from the Greek *eidon*, and as used by Him in this context it has nothing to do with *visually* seeing. It has everything to do with perception. It is God who gives those to whom He reveals Himself the spiritual insight that others do not have and cannot get from normal life's experiences. It is this reason that we should be thankful for the major miracle that God has worked in our minds so that He has broken the carnal perceptions and their biases formed from infancy against Him, His truth, His way of life, and His Son.

Jesus has given us many warnings, but none more blunt than the time is coming that whosoever kills you will think that he offers God service, just as those fundamentalist Mormons did to their sister-in-law. They thought they were doing God's service. We are seeing many indications from the world around us that events are building to the time when this admonition may come to pass in our lives.

Let us close off the sermon this evening with Romans 13, verses 11 through 14.

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**Romans 13:11-14** And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light [truth; light symbolizes truth]. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

Let us all use this Feast as a turning point, because time and its events are not waiting for us to *get* ready. The enemy is steadily moving his forces, and we must be preparing now. The handwriting is already on the wall. So remember, your perceptions are *your* reality, and it is one of our responsibilities to make sure our perceptions are as close to *God's* truth—God's reality—as we can make them.