

The Handwriting Is On The Wall (2011)

The Underground Church

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I want to begin this sermon by reading the entirety of a psalm. As I am reading this psalm, you will hear this subject is appropriate to the sermon. You might want to think about this subject in regard to what is going on in the world today and the way you are reacting to it emotionally. Think about the way it feels for you to experience what is going on, wondering what is going on, and how bad this thing is going to get. My Bible does not attribute this psalm to David, but whoever the writer was, he felt a certain amount of desperation about what is going on.

Psalms 94:1-23 O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongs—O God, to whom vengeance belongs, shine forth! Rise up, O Judge of the earth; render punishment to the proud. Lord, how long will the wicked, how long will the wicked triumph? [Think about that thought right there.] They utter speech, and speak insolent things; all the workers of iniquity boast in themselves. They break in pieces Your people, O Lord, and afflict Your heritage. They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless. Yet they say, “The Lord does not see, nor does the God of Jacob understand.” Understand, you senseless among the people; and you fools, when will you be wise? He who planted the ear, shall He not hear? He who formed the eye, shall He not see? He who instructs the nations, shall He not correct? He who teaches man knowledge? The Lord knows the thoughts of man, that they are futile. Blessed is the man whom You instruct, O Lord, and teach out of Your law, that You may give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit is dug for the wicked. [Peace, you see, peace of mind, from the days of adversity.]

For the Lord will not cast off His people, nor will He forsake His inheritance. But judgment will return to righteousness, and all the upright in heart will follow it. Who will rise up for me against the evildoers? Who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity? [God seems to be saying that.] Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul would soon have settled in silence. If I say, “My foot slips,” Your mercy, O Lord, will hold me up. In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul. Shall the throne of iniquity, which devises evil by law, have fellowship with You? [Think about that thought. Who devises evil by law, which is taking place in a grand scale in the United States of America?] They gather together against the life of the righteous, and condemn innocent blood. But the Lord has been my defense, and my God, the rock of my refuge. He has brought on them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness; the Lord our God shall cut them off.

I believe that this psalm is appropriate for the time that we are living in. During this period of time, we may need some reassuring encouragement of God’s faithfulness. Living conditions will deteriorate and outright, direct persecution will come closer and closer. The author of this psalm obviously felt as though he was in a precarious position.

What is the church supposed to do in such a time? What has it done in the past? The history of past eras are actually quite clear. There were times when it fled so that it could preach another day as it did in the 70s AD. There were also times that it went underground, so to speak, and sometimes literally went underground.

The word 'under' generally means beneath, below, lower than, or inferior to. It is capable of being used as a noun, preposition, adjective, or adverb. It has very versatile use in the English language. Its primary application appears to designate a specific location in relation to something else. We say a person is under authority, the rug is under furniture, or a person is under oath or under the penalty of the law. When we designate that something is underground, we indicate that whatever it is, it is completely buried, covered, and out of sight. It might be a sewer system, water, or electrical lines; even trains, some might call a subway that runs underground.

Underground can also stand on its own and take on the dimensions of a noun and can become the subject of much conversation and as the one who orders or actions. When this occurs, it often takes on the aura of something clandestine, secret, hidden, and working out of sight. Perhaps it can even be defined as "menacingly to subvert what is seen." The meaning is not always to subvert. At times the activity is hidden in order to preserve and to save. Sometimes to subvert and save at one and the same time.

For instance, during the Civil War, the underground railroad did both. It served to subvert the efforts of slave owners to recapture their runaway slaves and, at the same time, served to preserve the freedoms of the runaway slave. It did this by providing a temporary safe haven before shuttling them off to another safe house. During WWII, every nation invaded by the Axis powers quickly organized resistance movements called The Underground. The purpose was to subvert the Germans' cause and to restore the nation's independence. Do you know that even in Germany there was an anti-Nazi underground that was trying to subvert the Nazis from within Germany?

There was a time in history of the church that being underground served a very important role in its preservation. This occurred when the Christian's had to go into hiding in Rome, in the catacombs, in order to escape the arresting forces of the Caesar. To be found and captured may have resulted in death. In this circumstance, the underground was a safe haven.

Isaiah 2:19 They shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, from the terror of the Lord and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily.

It appears they will be going into the holes of rocks and caves in order to preserve their lives. In this case, going underground is not going to be their salvation from God's wrath.

Revelation 11:1-4 Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angels stood, saying, "Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months. And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth.

It is very clear that the Two Witnesses have not yet appeared. If they have, they have not done anything that would particularly attract attention, even to the scattered church. This lack of identification places us somewhere within the period that God allots for the measuring of the church. The speaker in Revelation 11:1-4 was the apostle John. He was given the responsibility of measuring the temple at that time; but it is instruction to you and me that the church is going to be measured.

Look at that word 'measure' in verse one. John is told to measure something that is already standing and therefore, measure is being used figuratively in the sense of evaluation. This is the important part for you and me to see that the temple is erected according to code; in this case, God's code, or another way of saying it, by righteous standards.

Paul describes in Ephesians 1-2 that the temple is God's church. The altar indicates the priests and the temple is where the people went to worship, but in the New Testament sense, the temple *is* the worshippers and it is *they* who are being measured. It is *they* who are being evaluated. Since the Two Witnesses have not yet appeared, we are still in this period of direct evaluation of the worshippers and their teachers.

Testing and evaluation is always going on. There are not any big gaps for a very long period of time because God is evaluating. He is testing and He is correcting. He does not want His people living in a way that is detrimental to the building of the character that He wants to be in them. He does not just let us go. We are being measured daily as to where our faith is and how loyal we are in the carrying out of our responsibilities.

I also believe, and I think most of you do too, that a more intense evaluation began when God blew the Worldwide Church of God apart. I believe that His doing this revealed not only His timing, but also His displeasure at what the church had become. At one and the same time, He scattered the worshippers in order to put them into more difficult circumstances to prove their loyalty; that is, their faith in Him without the comfort and seeming security of a large organization. It is easy to belong to a larger organization. In terms of what we have gone through, that is our evaluation, we can always convince ourselves we can hide.

That is what Psalm 94 was saying—that the people of the earth say, "God does not see. God does not hear." If you are a part of a great big group, we get that same feeling. We can hide. So we do not live our life as carefully as we should. We are not as faithful in carrying out our responsibilities. We tend to let things slide because God would not be all that interested in little old me, would He? Oh yes, He would! Nothing slides from God for very long before something happens in order for us to be brought up short, if we are on the ball. God sees us whether we are standing alone or part of small and scattered groups, tucked away in some outlying area away from population centers. That has been the church's history from as far back as 70 AD.

The Worldwide Church of God was an anomaly in terms of the history of the church. It got to be a fairly good-sized organization. I mean fairly good-sized for the church of God; not as measured against the Catholic Church, Presbyterian Church, or the Episcopal Church, but measured in terms of a church of God. The Worldwide Church of God was an anomaly. In that anomaly, I believe that very many of us were just sliding along and the church became a social organization for very many. But when God blew it apart, our faith in God began to be tested in a way that it had not been while we were in the Worldwide Church of God. The comfort of the large group was removed.

The United States of America contains the last large bastion of true Christianity in the entire world. I want you to consider three things that I think most of you are aware of.

First, look at what is happening within the world at large that is of a prophetic nature. They tend to indicate, at least somewhat, to some degree, the times that we are living in.

Second, look at what is happening to, and within, the Christian church within the world at large. I am thinking of that mostly in terms of the various churches of God that are scattered around the world; but, again, most specifically in the United States of America. You know that things are not all that stable in the churches of God here in the United States of America.

Number three is what the largest portion of the remainder of this sermon is about. Look at what is happening worldwide in persecutions against Christianity, in general and against Christian beliefs, especially in the United States. The general immediate future of the church looks about as precarious as Psalm 94 was to that event that man was going through (whoever wrote that psalm).

I am going to read to you a fairly large number of news reports for what is going on. I think that you may be a bit shocked about what is going on to Christianity worldwide. But in the United States, I want you to think about this in terms of things being done *against* Christian beliefs. Child sacrifice is commonly called abortion, but it is a common practice. It is literally murder on demand, done to satisfy a lust. We have adherents of feminism, lesbianism, homosexuality, and same-sex marriage. They are trashing these God-given gifts of marriage, and wholesome, stable marriages are at the foundation of a strong nation. These beliefs of the churches of God are directly under fire as primitive and intolerant.

Tolerance of immorality is generally at such a high level, any lifestyle seems to be acceptable. In fact, very many people seem to have no concept that what they do has any impact on others. For example, how many newborns have been condemned to live life almost on a sub-human level because their mother took drugs? “Doesn’t affect anybody else?” How much of the very soil that our food grows in has been poisoned by mankind? How many people on earth are suffering afflictions because they are ingesting genetically modified foods?

Brethren, God clearly appears to have begun to seriously make mankind pay for what they have done in the past. It even appears as though the earth has been knocked off its axis to some degree and powerful volcanoes are erupting on the Pacific Rim Ring of Fire. It is becoming almost downright common to hear of a magnitude seven earthquake. That used to be pretty rare. Now we are getting two or three a month. How about the tsunami that hit Japan? Who knows what damage to human health the radioactive dust and ash filtering down on the Northern Hemisphere will cause. It is coming here! It is beginning to wreak.

This past spring’s violent storms were a terrifying, deadly, and financially costly experience for our Midwest and Southeast. We are hearing reports from a long-range weather forecaster, named James Madden, of Exakta Weather. He has accurately predicted the last two European winter weather conditions and he is now warning the governments in Europe to get ready now. He said this year is going to be the worst of the last three years, especially for England and Scotland. He is warning of even colder temperatures accompanied by heavy snows. I ask myself a question, “Whatever happened to the warm, Gulf Stream waters that formerly kept those areas temperatures reasonably moderate?” I will begin to make this brief overview a little bit more dramatic in one particular area of our lives.

John 16:1-4 “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. But these things I have told you, that

when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them. And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.”

Are you aware that on a worldwide basis, persecutions of Christians are increasing dramatically in numbers and in intensity? Except for the most obvious things like court decisions rendered against religion generally, I believe that most people calling themselves Christians in America are unaware of this. Except for reports found on the Internet, it is virtually unreported on the national news on television or radio. You may find some of these statistics and events shocking.

The first one was a local one for the Ritenbaughs because it comes from radio station WBT in Charlotte, NC. The date was August 24, 2011. The announcer said, “The United Nations reports that persecutions against Christians are ongoing in 131 nations. That is more than against any other religion.”

The next report is older, but it gives a good overview. The source is Daily Christian News Service dated February 6, 2001. The title of the report was, ‘Persecution of Christians Growing in the United States’ written by Thomas Horn. Quote: “More Christians died for their faith in the twentieth century than at any other time in history, says Christian Solidarity International. Global reports indicate that over 150,000 Christians were martyred last year, chiefly outside of the United States. However, statistics are changing: persecution of Christians is on the increase in the United States. What’s happening to bring about this change?”

More Christians were martyred in the twentieth century than all of the rest of the time combined! All of the persecutions that took place from the time of Christ right on through the dark ages when the Catholic Church was running wild over there in Europe.

Quoting again from Thomas Horn’s article. “According to some experts a pattern is emerging reminiscent of Jewish persecution in post-war Germany. ‘Isolation of, and discrimination against Christians is growing almost geometrically,’ says Don McAlvany in the Midnight Herald. This is the way it started in Germany against the Jews. As they became more isolated and marginalized by the Nazi propaganda machine, as popular hatred and prejudice against the Jews increased among the German people, wholesale persecution followed. Could this be where the growing anti-Christian consensus in America is taking us?”

He means the Christians become as the Jews became more isolated in World War II.

Interesting thought. That is why I asked that question earlier about all of the anti-Christian judgments that have been made in the courts of the United States of America. So be aware brethren that Christianity all over America is being increasingly marginalized by court decisions against the beliefs and practices by our secular governments. It is not just federal government—it is the state government, it is the municipal governments. It has gone down that far now as they become increasingly more dictatorial as time moves on. That was the year 2000.

This next report is from Fox News, February 15, 2011, titled “Critics Slam U. S. Government, Media for their ‘Weak’ Response to Anti-Christian Attacks”:

At least 65 Christians have been killed in attacks across the Muslim world in recent months, sparking sharp criticism from human rights groups that charge the U.S. government and media are not doing nearly enough to speak out against the violence. A

shooting in Egypt last month that killed a Christian man and injured five Christian women was just the latest in a series of attacks, several of which took place around the holiday season: A New Year's bombing at a Coptic Christian Church in Alexandria, Egypt, killed 23 people and injured more than 100; Christmas Eve blasts in Nigeria killed at least 32—just part of a night of terror across the country that saw three other churches attacked and six worshippers killed; six perished in a Christmas Day Catholic Church bombing on the Island of Jolo in the Philippines; and a string of New Year's Eve bombings in Iraq left two dead and at least 13 wounded.

This was a February report and I do not know whether you are aware but another outbreak of persecution is taking place right now in Egypt.

This next source is the New Europe Website. This one is quite interesting. The date is November 15, 2010. Title: "Persecution against Christians Remains Unnoticed". The author is Konrad Syzmanski. He is a member of the European Parliament from Poland.

It is without doubt that freedom of religion constitutes a pillar of human rights. It has been stated in the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Article 9.1) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 18). The practice shows however that the persecution on the grounds of religion or belief is still present worldwide. According to the statistics at least 75% of religious persecution is directed against people of the Christian faith and each year about 170,000 Christians suffer because of their beliefs. The total number of faithful who are discriminated amounts already to 100 million." [He is talking just about in the year 2010.] It is also a known fact that more Christians have been martyred in the 20th century than all of the prior 1900 years. All in all, it makes Christians the most persecuted religious group.

Most of those people, the overwhelming majority of those people, are Christian in name. But they are sincere in their faith and they bear that name and so they are being attacked. I believe that God is acting as He has done in the past. He beats around the bush there at first. Each time He beats around the bush He gets a little bit closer, and a little bit closer, and a little bit closer, until finally, BAM! It is hitting us. I will read a report on that in just a little bit.

Mr. Syzmanski's comment continues, "European silence on the problem of religious freedom undermines our credibility in the area of human rights in the world. We have a clear obligation in this field and nothing can excuse us from a reaction to the mass martyrdom of Christians which we witnessed in the 20th and 21st centuries."

This next quote is from the "Jeremiah Project Website", undated and no author was named.

Topping the list of countries which have mounted a campaign against Christians are China and Sudan, followed by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Burma, Greece, Ethiopia, and Vietnam. (Washington Watch, May, 1998) Increasing persecution is also found in Cuba, Laos, and North Korea.

Never before in American history have Christians witnessed being hated for following Jesus Christ as they are today. While the war on Christianity in America and persecution of Christians have not yet reached the feverish pitch of persecution as it has in other

parts of the world, there is a battle being waged. There is still a Constitution in America that protects them and allows them to freely practice their faith. But broiling beneath the surface, the same hatred of God that exists in other parts of the world is festering in our institutions. [Institutions, meaning the government, academia, etc. in business institutions.] Slowly, methodically, and incrementally, the anti-God forces are working to remove that Constitutional barrier and replace it with the ten Planks of Communism.

It is important to recognize that those engaged on this war on Christianity, working for the dissolution of society, and breakdown of the family, have a spiritual agenda. They are not merely attempting to dismantle the historic cultural values of this nation and move us toward a new world order. They also want to destroy Christianity and Bible-based religion. It is a clear part of their agenda, and they have already moved a long way in that direction.

Notice, nobody in here mentions Satan. Do you understand he is the one who is pushing this and God is permitting it? He is allowing it and He is allowing it for our good ultimately. To stir us up and drive us closer to Him in faith, submitting to Him, being loyal to His Word, and we had better take the hint! Now to continue with the quote from “Jeremiah Project Website”:

God-hating zealots include people like David Rockefeller, Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and the other politicians, European royalty, world bankers and CEOs of multinational corporations who are members of the Council on Foreign Relations, the Bilderberger group, and the Trilateral Commission. Their stated plan is to have a one-world government which is opposed to God and Christ.

Quoted from FOXNews.com on 12/16/10, “Pope Benedict XVI said Thursday that Christians suffer more religious persecution than any other group”. This quote was taken from the pope’s World Peace Day message.

I purposely began this Feast in this way because I want us to understand that the intensity of the end time conditions is moving closer to us personally. The man I quoted, from the “Jeremiah Project Website” used the term ‘incrementally’. So far it has not touched us directly, but the events are close enough now that we must be fully aware. We do not want to be caught like the five foolish virgins.

On the Feast of Trumpets I gave a sermon that I did not finish ["Are We Already In Captivity?"]; nothing unusual about that. I think I gave enough of it to you that you got the drift of my thoughts. In case you did not, I was saying that I believe America is already in a form of captivity without ever having to leave our homeland. The invasion of our land began in earnest almost 100 years ago, actually in 1913. It seems to be nearing the cusp of completion now.

It really began in earnest with the use of an outright Babylonian banking system, which immediately created a serious leak in our God-given prosperity. The money was drained into the coffers of people bent on accruing power unto themselves. This was combined with the desire for a complete change of government and morality within this nation.

By about 1950, much—and I do mean much—of the American federal government was in the hands of the thieves. I do not mean that they occupied the offices, but they very heavily influenced those in the offices through their financial power.

In the 1960s, the transition to a corrupt morality was very, very much under way. God was kicked out of the schools and was being openly forsaken. The evidence was right on the streets. The cities were burning as a result of riots.

In the 1970s, abortion became the law of the land and great slaughter of innocents was under way. "Make a chain for the land is full of bloody crimes," God says through Ezekiel.

In the 1990s, we had an openly sexually-immoral president and much of the citizenry loved him. In the last 20 years, we seemingly have endless wars without resolution. The nation is now among the most hated on earth. Much of our manufacturing is gone and we have a debt approaching \$15 trillion. Foreigners are buying our land up like crazy. It is their means of getting what we owe to them in that debt at least somewhat satisfied. The money was drained into the hands of those people.

Add to that, our nation is literally being invaded from the south. We have had two successive presidents who refuse to do anything about it when their first responsibility is to protect the United States. That is really weird. Meanwhile, several states are being pulled into bankruptcy by the invasion. They have begun selling their governmental properties to balance their budgets. Internally, we are pressured by political correctness and multi-culturalism.

Every hour that passes, the US accumulates \$170 Billion in additional debt. *Every hour!* Meanwhile, our president transports the family dog to the family vacation in a separate airplane, along with his handler, at public expense. That is pretty disgusting!

The economy is stifled by endless government regulations that must be met before development can even begin. There are pressures of the feminists, homosexuals, and same-sex marriage movements that have the courts and the citizenry on the run.

At this point, the battle appears to be almost over. We are captive, to some extent, to our own shadow government that has its eyes on ruling the entire world. They are not trying to do it alone. They are tightly bound with European bankers and political figures who are doing exactly the same thing. They are working pretty much in harmony with one another.

With all of this going on, is the church going to have to go underground in order to survive and at the same time, continue to do its work? For one last scripture, turn to book of Matthew.

Matthew 24:9-12 "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold."

I think everybody in here that understands anything that I am saying, that understands news reports that they hear, will agree with me that lawlessness abounds. We have to deal with it. It has a wearying, stressful affect. Jesus Christ said here, that because lawlessness abounds, love grows cold.

This is quite a world that we live in. Never has there ever been a civilization, as far as we know, that has had such bad news about what is going on around us. That cannot have a good affect because we

get distracted by it. We are constantly looking for security in such an environment. The pressures of living in the world are already having a negative affect on many. Jesus said many will be offended. He did not say a few or some. He said many will be offended and the love of many will grow cold.

I believe that many are losing their spiritual bearings. They are wandering around from group to group like leaves blowing in the wind. I wonder, do they know any more what really matters? They seem to be comfortable. They seem to think that being comfortable at services is what is important. Even more intensity and more thorough scrutiny will be brought on by the preaching of the Two Witnesses. I put that in because it is going to keep getting more intense. When they show up, it is going to really get intense.

We are not there yet, but surely, we must take some steps. Use this Feast of Tabernacles to successfully move in the right direction. We should all allow ourselves to be inspired. Take the right steps, beginning right here in Topeka, Kansas. Brethren, the handwriting is on the wall. It is very clear for us. Take serious notice of which direction we are going to go in. What is going to be our focus? Make sure it is the right one.