

Fully Accepting God'S Sovereignty (Part 1)

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I never fail to be amazed whenever we are at an occasion like this and all of the speakers do their own picking of the subject and arranging it, or putting it in order and delivering it, that how often the subjects are so meshed with one another, not only just with one sermon or one sermonette, but actually for the entire feast. There seems to be a theme that is going right on through, and it gives one pleasure to preach the gospel to you; but Somebody else is doing this.

This sermon is directly tied to the one I gave on the holy day, and I titled that one "Where Do We Fit?" We ended that sermon briefly expounding I Corinthians 12 in which Paul uses the body analogy to explain that the church is not just thrown together. It is purposely well-organized, and we fit snugly within it.

In this time when the church is scattered, this may not be clearly seen by us, but again Paul states in I Corinthians 12:18 that God has set the members—each one of them—in the body just as He pleases, and in addition to this, He has gifted each member to carry out functions within the body.

God is still working out His purpose, and it is essential for us to our growth, and possibly even to our salvation, that we believe this and give ourselves over to keep moving forward in our relationship with God despite what we may see with our eyes. It is clearly stated in Isaiah 46:10 that He knows the end from the beginning. God does not lie; therefore this statement establishes that He is working toward a very definite goal. You cannot know the end from the beginning without having a specific goal in mind.

Nothing in God's purpose happens randomly. I am talking about *His* purpose. Men and women do things randomly, but God never does anything randomly, and so in His church we have all been made part of this massive purpose. When I say "massive," I mean it. I am talking about billions and billions and billions of people involved in God's purpose. It is time-consuming. It has been around six thousand years already since Adam and Eve. It is an awesome project, and we have been given a very, I would call it, general responsibility—an overall one.

I want you to turn to Hebrews 10, and we will see this statement that gives us the general responsibility that He has given to everybody, and I might add here, that because He has given this responsibility and He has placed us in the church, He has

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also enabled us by gifting us so that we are able to perform what I am going to read for you right now.

Hebrews 10:35-38 Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: "For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith."

Living by faith is required of everybody, and every one of us has been gifted to be able to fulfill this responsibility. He is the One who may lay upon us trials that will test that faith. But remember again, He promises He will never put us into a situation that is beyond us—with our faith and God's help, because He expects us to cry out to Him for help. He is there to help so that we do not get in over our heads. And so these trials of faith are things, that with His help, we are able to accomplish.

Hebrews 10:38 Now the just shall live by faith, but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.

You can understand why He would have no pleasure, because He has promised He will help us through this. So actually we are breaking faith if we draw back because we are not trusting Him, we are not going to Him in prayer, or in some way, shape, or form, doubt has crept in, and our confidence has slipped away.

Our overall responsibility is to live by faith, and it is to this end, at the very least, each member has been gifted.

Verse 38 is both a statement of fact—this is what is going to be done—and at the same time it is a command: "You *shall* live by faith." I do not make light of this, and I am not saying that living by faith is going to be easy. It requires a great deal of focus and disciplined living to do this, and to do this well we must fully accept God's sovereignty, and that is the subject of this sermon.

Where do we fit? We answered that. We are part of the body. We generally know that we have been placed in there, but in order to accomplish the work that He wants to do within us in the creation of us in His image, we must accept God's sovereignty.

Recall that many in ancient Israel failed along the way to the Promised Land because their faith failed at some point in the journey. Some lasted quite a long time before they

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gave up. We must ask the question: faith in *whom*, and faith in *what* must we have? It is of course faith in God, but have we fully accepted what He is like and what He does?

Recall that Jesus clearly states that we must place Him above all else in life. Most of the time when we are baptizing people, or counseling them for baptism, we go through Luke 14:24-26 where Jesus said you have to place Him over and above mother, father, sister, brother, aunt, uncle, and so forth, and then He goes on to say, and your own life also. I am not saying anything here that you should not already know. Jesus clearly states that we must place Him above all else in our life.

Now what are His qualities and attributes? What is your vision or your understanding of God's place in your life when maybe much more of Him, His character, and what His judgments are like on a day-to-day basis once we know them? Are we still willing to give Him the go-ahead with our life?

As we begin here we must be reminded that "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." That is an awesome statement. It is really sobering that we carry the potential for *spiritual* death around with us all the time, because that nature is in us, and that nature is not subject to God, and it cannot be subject to God. I believe that a major reason the Israelites failed in the wilderness is because it never entered their mind at the beginning of the journey, or for that matter partly through the journey, that it would be so difficult.

Hebrews 11:27 By faith he [Moses] forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.

Bill was talking about "seeing God at work in our life." We know he did not mean that we are seeing Him with our eyes. He is the invisible God. It says that right in verse 27, but we do see Him working. We should recognize the activity in our life.

Now here was Moses, one of the great men of faith in all of the Bible, and he succeeded. He endured as if he was seeing Him who is invisible. Brethren, I believe that this is what sets those who made it into the Promised Land apart from those who failed. The concept that they carried of God with them greatly aided their sanctification, and in a nutshell, they saw God, they knew God, and eternal life is to *know God*, so said our Savior in John 17:3.

There is an understanding that is vital to our salvation, and I will show you a vital piece of knowledge that because of human nature's lasting proclivity to resist God, it is

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something that is part of our life now that we must never forget. I do not mean that I am saying we have it on our mind every moment. I am saying though (as we live life, and especially when we get into a difficult situation that is trying our faith) this is something we always have to remember, and if we remember it, it will probably help us a great deal to continue to go on because we will begin to see that there is reason why what is occurring is occurring.

I want you to turn to Revelation 4. This is something we must keep in mind because it is one of the foundational principles of living a life by faith, and we have to deal with this.

Revelation 4:8-11 The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” [They are describing a mighty Being, and that mighty Being they are deferring to is our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.] Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.”

This is one powerful Being that we serve and worship! He not only created everything, it was for *His* will. Do you know what the word “will” is indicating here? It is the exercise of His power—the end to which He is bringing everything. This is speaking of our Savior and Creator. Now without directly saying it, it touches on a major issue in this great purpose being worked out, and the issue is this: Unlike Satan and his demons, will we, by faith, be loyal to our Creator God as He works out and governs His purpose for each one of us personally?

It is not difficult for any of us perceiving Jesus Christ as being the Creator and taking care of all the big things. What we have trouble with is somehow really accepting the fact that He is concerned about us, and that He is overseeing every aspect of our life. Do you know why? He not only loves us, it is *His job* as assigned by the Father. It is His responsibility to save us. He has the assignment of High Priest. The word “priest” incidentally literally comes from a term that means “bridge builder.” It is Jesus Christ’s responsibility to build bridges between us and the Father, and by that means He prepares us so that we will be acceptable to the Father as part of His family. As part of that responsibility He has to oversee what is going on in our life in a very personal and

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direct way.

We are leading to what I am trying to get across here. Our Savior is a person. He is not just an idea. He is not just some vaporous thing that is off in the heaven. He is more of a being than any of us. We are dealing with a personality, and when we sin the sin is against Him personally, because He died for us. It was He who intervened in order to remove sin from us so that we could be accounted worthy to go before the Father because we have been given and we now bear the righteousness of Jesus Christ. I want us to get it across to our own mind that *He is personally involved in our life day by day, minute by minute*. He is omniscient. He is always there. He is never any further than a thought away, and so He is concerned.

Now can we accept this fact of His personal participation in our life, or perhaps maybe in our impatience or pride somehow allow human nature to resist, and maybe even to rebel?

Verse 11 contains a key statement. He created all things in the first place, and they are all created for *His* purpose to be fulfilled. Remember, He is the High Priest, and His purpose now is to save us, to bring us into the Family of God. That is His job right now. Maybe saying “job” demeans it somewhat, but on the other hand that is His responsibility.

In looking at God’s creation and seeing the perfection, the beauty, and the power that is in it, do you not think the creation should give you a bit of an idea of the kind of mind we are dealing with and how concerned He is that what He is doing with you is going to work out perfectly the way *He* sees it? Remember, He made everything to fit into *His* will, not ours—*His*. Our job is just to participate by yielding to what His will is, and this is where the hard part comes in every once in awhile because we are so impatient, so unbending, and so hard to deal with. Much of it is not intended on our part. I do not mean to run you down that way. It is just that is the way human nature is, and it is fighting against God all the time. Our problem is we allow ourselves to drag us in with it.

The KJV translates verse 11 in this way: “For You have created all things, and for Your pleasure they are and were created.”

Just change the word “will” [in the NKJV] and use the word “pleasure,” and you begin to put into it a positive emotional quality that is in Him. It is *His pleasure* to do this. It is *His pleasure* to set goals toward which He is going to work in our life to fit us into the program that He is responsible for, to bring to a head, to fruition. Satan could not accept this, and look at what resulted.

Let us bring this very heavy thought right down to our level and to our time and examine it in more detail. I mean examine it right now, in this sermon, whatever the issues are in your life. Can we live by faith that He is, knows what He is doing, and that by His merciful act has made us a part of His pleasure, and thus us fully accepting whatever He brings to bear upon us for *His* purposes after we consider what we will see He is and does? I had to put that question in there because what He is and does sometimes hurts.

I am going to keep building upon this theme—"His pleasure"—so that we get it thoroughly.

Ephesians 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.

We are seeing some of the parameters of the goals that are set before Jesus Christ by the Father and Him, working in conjunction with one another. This is what is going to be accomplished within the church.

Ephesians 1:9-10 Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times [at the very end of the program], He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him [in Christ].

He is talking about bringing together all of His creative efforts that He has done in peoples' lives in the church. That "one" in verse 10 could refer to one family, one kingdom. That is what we are all going to be gathered together in. Right now we are in this organization—the church of God—but this is only a part-time thing for us. Eventually we are going to come to a place where the reality will be fulfilled.

There is nothing complex about this truth; however it is sometimes hard to live by. One of the major reason why is because it is *His* creation. It is *His* will that is involved, and because there is so much we do not know about Him we may find it difficult to deal with. This is usually because our understanding is so limited, and sometimes so shallow.

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There was one thing I said there that we have to consider because it gives us a bit of difficulty from time to time, and that is, we have our way of doing things, and we want things to be done this way. Usually part of that way is we always want to be comfortable in what we are doing. We do not want anybody to push us, to disturb us, and knock us off the pattern that we are following. But wait a minute now! We are to be subject to the will of the One who created us, and He may have different ideas in mind for our life than we do. This is where it gets difficult. So can we still accept Him knowing full well that this is going to go on? But with this understanding this is also why we need to come to know Him and to fully accept Him as our sovereign God.

Isaiah 40:13-14 Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or as His counselor has taught Him? With whom did He take counsel, and who instructed Him, and taught Him in the path of justice? Who taught Him knowledge, and showed Him the way of understanding?

Nobody human did that. I read this because I want you to be assured by repeating, verse after verse, that He is directing everything in *your* life according to the counsel of *His* will.

Let us go back to the book of Romans where Paul quoted a portion of this. Paul just put a New Testament spin on it.

Romans 11:33-36 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! “For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?” “Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?” For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

I am giving that to you because I want you to see described over and over again the mind of the One with whom we are dealing. The important thing so far is He does everything according to the good pleasure of *His* will, and brethren, if we are living by faith we will allow Him to mold and shape us through what He designs for you and me. Can we do that? That is our responsibility.

Again, the issue is that He may have one mind toward which He is working for you and me, and we have a different idea altogether about what we want to accomplish in the time given to us. This is not easy to deal with, and it is what causes us problems with

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our faith because we do not want to give up our way. We do not want to be pushed off the objectives that we have in *our* mind.

Let us look at how David thought of Jesus Christ. We will see this in I Chronicles 29. In my Bible this is titled "King David's Last or Final Prayer of Thanksgiving."

I Chronicles 29:10-15 Therefore David blessed the Lord before all the assembly; and David said: "Blessed are You, Lord God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and You are exalted as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; in Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. "Now therefore, our God, we thank You and praise Your glorious name. But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly as this? For all things come from You, and of Your own we have given You. For we are aliens and pilgrims before You, as were all our fathers; our days on earth are as a shadow, and without hope.

This is a portion of a benediction given by David preceding the building of the Temple, as provision was made for it so that Solomon could begin construction with everything in order. The words should be meaningful, coming from one whose heart was said by God to be after *His* own heart. The prayer, though, schools us in how David thought of God. David knew God about as well as anybody who ever walked on the face of this earth.

Now, do we look at our Savior in the same way? What did David think about God? It is expressed in the prayer about greatness, power, glory, majesty, rulership, headship, and strength, and how puny we are by comparison. I bring this up because we fight against Him. I do not mean that we absolutely set our will to do that, but responding to Him is not always easy. We are nothing. David says we are aliens, and we are pilgrims in a world that gives us no recognition, and our days compared to His are but a shadow, and despite this we are able to make an offering because He has given us, thus making the offering possible.

Who is this One that we pray to, calling Him Father (Isaiah 9:6), Lord, God? Who is this One that we refer to as our Creator, as our Healer, our Savior, or Sustainer? Who is this One referred to here as the Almighty Ruler, Lifegiver, the Forgiver of sins? He is the sovereign Ruler of all He has created. The term "sovereignty" first speaks of supremacy of authority, but God reveals Himself in His Word as supreme in every aspect of life,

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with the exception of personal evil. He *is* the Most High. There is no one higher except the Father.

Now to say that God is sovereign, to declare that He is the Almighty, the possessor of all power in heaven and earth so that none can defeat His counsel, thwart His purpose, or resist His will, and thus it states something that I think was appropriate in the song we sang at the beginning of this service. I want you to turn to it—Psalm 115. Just two lines there, but it shows you what the psalmist thought that we need to know. It is a simple thing, a simple statement, but it is key to this message

Psalm 115:3 But our God [Jesus Christ] is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases.

Who is going to stop Him? He is one with the Father. The Father is not going to stop Him. They are of one mind. The Father turned over that responsibility to Jesus Christ. I went into all this description at the beginning to show you that He is personally involved with us, and here we find He does whatever He pleases. Let us consider this.

Is all of this merely a listing of grandiose titles of One who is great in His being but distant and remote in terms of the actual operations of our life? Do we relate to Him merely generally as most people in the world do, or is His greatness truly personal to us because we know Him personally, and we trust Him that He is there? That is the key.

Brethren, this was Israel's problem. They knew there was a God in heaven, but they did not trust Him, and therefore they did not believe Him. It is that simple. Do we trust Him, that He really knows what is going on in our lives, and that He cares to a depth that we cannot even begin to understand? I know personally I see Jesus Christ in my mind's eye looking at John Ritenbaugh, shaking His head—"Oh no. What are We going to do with him?" But He does not cry, because He has resources, and He is patient. He is going to help.

Let us go back to Ephesians 1. We stopped at verse 10.

Ephesians 1:11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.

Do you see what that says? When the Father, through Jesus Christ, called you, He

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already had a position set aside for you and me in His Kingdom, and He is determined to prepare you and me to fill that position. Because the apostles were beginning to doubt, or whatever, He told them—"In My Father's house are many mansions." There are offices. He was telling them, brethren, "It's already set aside, but I've got to prepare you to be able to fill that office." Can we trust that He will do that? That is where He is headed.

Ephesians 1:11-12 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory [both now and later].

Do we get the significance of the truth that He works all things in your life too according to the counsel of *His* will? The truth does not apply to just the big things. Do you really perceive your relationship to Him as being the one that is given in the Bible of "potter to the clay," that *He* is the forming One, shaping us? It is our responsibility to accept and submit.

Do you live your life as though He is truly omnipotent, omniscient, and individually aware of you? Do you live your life conducting it in such a manner to fully understand that this awesome Being is actively and personally involved? By viewing Him as potter, do we grasp that He has every right to mold the clay into whatever form, state, and whatever use in life that *He* chooses? He can fashion from the same lump one person for honor; another for dishonor.

From the Old Testament we can pick up quite clearly that He can determine our sex, our relation, our race, our ethnicity, our level of wealth, where we live our life. He is under no law or rule outside of His own nature and purpose. He is a law unto Himself, and is under no obligation to give an account of His matters to anybody else, and He exercises His power as *He* wills, *where* He wills, and when He wills. Do we trust His judgment?

He is not merely overseeing our life, but participating in it, ultimately responsible for what is happening in it, as well as those big national and worldwide occurrences that we hear of in the news. The sovereignty of the God of the Bible is absolute, irresistible, and infinite, and our trust is to be in Him.

God's purpose and plan has been, and is being carried out as He purposed, and nobody can turn Him aside, and now His purpose and plan has reached out to include you, even as He predestined when He declared the end from the beginning.

Have you caught the vision? Are you willing to completely turn your life over to this One who does not always act in a way that is pleasant to us? For instance, He immediately struck Aaron's sons and Uzza dead, but allowed countless others who did things we might consider far worse to live a long and seemingly full life. God permitted Methuselah to live a thousand years. He gave Samson strength given to no other person who ever lived. Jesus went to the Pool of Siloam and chose one man to heal, and ignored all the others.

Why did He allow the Morgan, the Vanderbilt, the Rockefeller families, and many, many others to amass incredible wealth, while at the same time allowing perhaps billions of people worldwide to just barely scrape by in miserable poverty?

When Israel entered the Promised Land, the city of Jericho lay in their path, barring their way of progress. God brought the walls down, and the city's defenses collapsed. That was the one and only time God did such a thing. He made Israel fight to overcome the other cities. Incidentally, they never finished the job.

How about this one? He painfully asked Peter three times if he loved Him right in front of everybody else—these people that Peter worked with, grew up with, were his buddies; and then He told him there would come a time in Peter's life when he would be taken to where he would not want to go. And after He said that to him, Peter began to wonder, and he turned around and pointed to John, and said, "What about him?" And Jesus said, "Don't let that bother you. If I want him to live to be a hundred, he's going to live to be a hundred."

You see, what I am getting at here is He makes decisions that may not fit well with us and may prove to be embarrassing. But remember, everything He does is going to be done according to the pleasure of *His* will, and it is going to be done out of loving concern for us as well, and that He knows the shape, the end from the beginning, that He wants to reach. Our job is to trust Him, that He is going to bring us there.

I mentioned the apostle John. I did not mention this yet, but just again to show you Jesus makes choices. The apostle John lived to be 100, or right around 100, but on the other hand Stephen is stoned to death just as everything was starting. Why did He not intervene there? He made that decision. Peter was crucified, according to legend, upside down. Very embarrassing. Paul was beheaded. So what right do we have to complain, seeing the witness of those great servants? They allowed Jesus faithfully to use them in whatever way He determined. It was according to the pleasure of *His* will, and they went along with it, in faith.

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What right do we have to complain bitterly sometimes of the discomfort that He creates for us to endure and to grow within? It is very clear that He could rescue everybody, but He does not, so have we fully accepted He may choose to put us through some difficult thing? Some of you have already gone through some difficult things, and you have endured. Do you wish that you could have done better? Do you wish that your trust had been to a higher degree than it was?

There is no absolute promise that any of us will be chosen to be led to a place of safety during the coming Tribulation. Can you have the faith in One so awesomely powerful, and yet know that He may make decisions that are painful for you personally to bear?

Let us continue this so that we have a good clear picture of our responsibility of living by faith, because everything is not peaches and cream. The creating of human beings into the image of God requires a great deal of testing as to whether we are going to be faithful under every circumstance.

Let us go to the book of Romans once again. This is a very clear, simple statement.

Romans 9:18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

That could have just as easily been translated, "He has mercy on whom He pleases, and on whom He pleases He hardens."

How about John the Baptist, and what he said in John 3:27? "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven." That is quite a statement. In that context where he said that, John was either implying the office he held as a prophet, or the disciples given to follow him, or were leaving him; thus John concluded from what he was told, that Jesus must increase and he must decrease. Now there was a man of faith. He just took it.

God also says, "Jacob I have loved. Esau I have hated." God clearly makes choices that may be personally hurtful to us, and we who have received His love in many, many ways already must fully understand that there is nothing in our heart or our character to attract the heart of God, and yet He loves us. It says so clearly in Ephesians 2:3 that all the children of Adam are children of wrath by nature. He does not call us because we are good guys.

Ephesians 2:3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the

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lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

Let us go on with this because I want you to get a good picture of Jesus Christ from this angle so that our faith can expand to know and to be able to include in our thinking that everything is not peaches and cream. There is going to be pressure applied to us, and sometimes it is going to catch us in difficult situations.

Let us go back to the Old Testament once again.

Isaiah 45:6-7 That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting that there is none besides Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other; I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the Lord, do all these things.'

God can be the author of both.

Now has it reached your mind yet that it is ultimately God who is bringing these terrible things to pass on earth? He may not necessarily actually create them, but as Sovereign Ruler He has to pass on it. Either He passes on it, or He does not, and if He does not pass on it, that is as far as that evil thing goes. But if He passes on it, then He has evaluated the effect that it is going to have on His purpose, and He decides at this time that it is a good thing to happen, and He passes on it.

What we have to consider here is that in some measure, those things—those calamities—are beginning to touch on us. By that I mean the church and His children. *He* is sovereign over the weather, and therefore He is ultimately responsible for droughts, for famine, for floods, and wars.

I want you to see something in the book of Lamentations—an open admission from God about His responsibility for the sacking of Jerusalem and all of the deaths that occurred. What we are looking at here in Lamentations is probably the after-effect as viewed by Jeremiah after three invasions by the Babylonians—one somewhere around 603-604 AD; another one that came along around 594-595 BC, and then the final one, which culminated in 586 BC, and Jerusalem was really devastated. Judah was devastated. There was a tremendous amount of loss of life. What we saw in that movie last night, through our mind's eye, as the rabbi was describing it, was nothing compared to what happened to Jerusalem.

Notice God's comment here. This is what Jeremiah records. Notice God is taking responsibility for what happened. He is not blaming it on the tool—Nebuchadnezzar's army. He said, "I did it." "I merely used them," is what He is saying.

Lamentations 2:1-4 How the Lord has covered the daughter of Zion [Judah, and of course more specifically Jerusalem] with a cloud in His anger! He cast down from heaven to the earth the beauty of Israel, and did not remember His footstool [Jerusalem] in the day of His anger. The Lord has swallowed up and has not pitied all the dwelling places of Jacob. He has thrown down in His wrath the strongholds of the daughter of Judah; He has brought them down to the ground; He has profaned the kingdom and its princes. He has cut off in fierce anger every horn of Israel; He has drawn back His right hand from before the enemy. He has blazed against Jacob like a flaming fire devouring all around. Standing like an enemy, He has bent His bow; with His right hand, like an adversary, He has slain all who were pleasing to His eye; on the tent of the daughter of Zion, He has poured out His fury like fire.

God became an enemy. This is Jesus Christ and what He did to His people Israel. If you are thinking along with me, He can do this to the church because the church belongs to Him. He purchased the church by the means of His blood. We belong to Him. He is able, legally even, to do whatever He pleases. Now hopefully He will not go any further than He already has.

It was Jesus Christ, not Satan, who blew apart the Worldwide Church of God because we were not pleasing to Him. In order to get us to the place where we *would* be pleasing to Him, He blew it apart, and He scattered us all over, mostly the United States. This is not the only place where devastation of the church has taken place. I think Gilbert [Boyer] has told us that at one time the church in Paris had around three or four hundred people in it. It is gone. It no longer exists. There is a small community in the Living Church of God and the Church of the Great God. That is it. God did that.

Lamentations 2:5-8 The Lord was like an enemy. He has swallowed up Israel, He has swallowed up all her palaces; He has destroyed her strongholds, and has increased mourning and lamentation in the daughter of Judah. He has done violence to His tabernacle, as if it were a garden; He has destroyed His place of assembly; the Lord has caused the appointed feasts and Sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion. In His burning indignation He has spurned the king and the priest. The Lord has spurned His altar, He has abandoned His sanctuary; He has given up the walls of her palaces into the

hand of the enemy. They have made a noise in the house of the Lord as on the day of a set feast. The Lord has purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion. He has stretched out a line; He has not withdrawn His hand from destroying; therefore He has caused the rampart and wall to lament; they languished together.

It goes on further and further of the things He has done. Brethren, can you begin to see why He says, from time to time, He wants us to *fear* Him—in a sense, to be afraid to do wrong, to do evil, to sin? You see, something like that can be the beginning of a positive change. That is what is going to happen to the United States. He is going to blow it apart, and that will be the beginning of a positive change. He has already told us what is going to happen, and we heard some of that in the sermons here during this Feast.

But He wants His church to know that He is far more serious with us than He is with the world that He is going to deal with later. Now is *our* time for salvation. We have to learn to fear Him, to really reverently highly respect and honor this great Being who created us in the first place, and has put us into a body that He is preparing to serve under Him in the Kingdom of God, and brethren, *the standards are high*.

We are not going to save ourselves through our works, but if He can manipulate us like He does clay into a jar, to prepare us to be in His Kingdom, and work with us as our minds are changed to really honestly and willingly give our lives into His hands in trust, we can go on in this vein.

God shows in other places in His Word that He brings earthquakes, forest fires, blizzards, disease epidemics, plagues of grasshoppers that consume our crops, causing people to starve. It is God who is ultimately responsible for the additive-laden food we consume. He could stop it in a moment, but by the mere fact that He is allowing it to go on, it has His favor at this time for some purpose in His plan.

Titus 1:13-16 This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth. To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

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This accusation by Paul begins by being made against the Cretans, but when he mentions Jewish fables, the Jews too become a part of those whom he is accusing; but accusing them of what? Of believing that God indeed does exist, but their conduct in life shows that they do not *truly* believe in a personal way. In other words, those he is accusing show by their conduct that they do not believe that they are truly personally answerable to Him—the Sovereign God.

I bring this up because this is exactly what is happening in the United States of America. A recent Barna poll shows that 80% of Americans believe in God; however, that belief has not impacted them sufficiently that it affects their conduct enough to make a difference in how life is actually lived in day-to-day practice, and so it brings forth a question. How can one live by faith if one does not have sufficient knowledge of the greatness, the closeness, and the awesome grace of God shown in mercy He has already given, and allows us to have just the barest relationship with Him, to come to know Him and fear Him?

What I am saying is, that just like we saw last night the arrogance of the people in Samaria in 723 BC—they believed in a Creator, in a God, but they were not giving their life over to Him. That is exactly what is happening here where 80% of Americans say they believe in God, but their life shows they do not believe Him.

So here is our goal. Our goal is to believe Him. We know that He exists. Our goal is to believe Him in such a way that it produces trust, that it produces a measure of fear so that in us there is a burning desire not to disappoint Him in any way. I will tell you why. Turn to II Timothy 2. This is here for us to read and understand. This is not complicated.

II Timothy 2:11-13 This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him [Our baptism professes that we died with Christ, and in order to show this, we are buried in the waters of baptism.], we shall also live with Him. [We come up out of the water.] If we endure [Jesus said those who endure to the end shall be saved.], we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him [mostly meaning, if we deny Him by the way we live—we profess that we know that He is, but we deny Him like the Jews did in Titus 1 and the Cretans did in Titus 1, God reacts.], He also will deny us. [Why?] If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.

God, our Savior, is always true to His character. He is always true to His love for us. He is always faithful in carrying out His responsibility, both to the Father and to us. He cannot deny Himself. To do so would be a lie, and He does not lie. He is always in tune,

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in harmony with His character, and that character is founded on His love for the Father, His love for the Father's purpose, and His love for you and me. So He will not react in this way unless we react in a very faithless way toward Him over and over again until we disqualify ourselves.

There is no reason for us to do that because He is always faithful to His promise. He is always there to help, to use that power of His mind, the power of His will, the power of His pleasure to do good to us. If we trust Him, that will come to us, and we will be saved.