

Who Are You?

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I do not know if we have ever considered ourselves as being heroes, but like it or not, this is where we are being taken by God, to be heroes. God is making us heroes.

The majority of personnel that receive the Congressional Medal of Honor are just ordinary people, such as yourselves. They began with basic training, and they went on and on. I considered reading several exploits of the Congressional Medal of Honor people, but I decided not to do that. I thought that best to be left undone, because the point is showing the exploits that we will accomplish, and the truly wonderful results that will be produced because of our exploits.

Does this world see us as being heroes? No, it does not. In fact, they see us as being just the opposite.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church. They had their problems, they had their growth problems and everything else, and he wrote them to encourage them, to remind them of who they were and what they had been given—no small thing, really a wonderful, wonderful example.

I Corinthians 1:1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,

When God calls somebody, He provides teachers for them as well. Sosthenes came out of the Jewish faith, and was quite an encouragement to all.

I Corinthians 1:2-4 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus [Think about that, you are sanctified.], called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord [That is you.], both theirs and ours: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus . . .

As we go on day by day in this world, and nobody really cares about us or notices us that much, we do not think of ourselves as being special, or having great gifts that have been given to us.

I Corinthians 1:5 . . . that you may be enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge . . .

Now the church at Corinth had a ton of problems, and they had a lot to overcome, but yet, they were being called by God, and were worked with by God. They had been given the truth that this world did not understand, and does not understand, as have you. They had many problems, but on they went.

I Corinthians 1:6-9 . . . even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Even though that was talked about with the Corinthians, that applies to all of us, each one of us. The gospel of Christ was established in you by miraculous means, and the gifts of course were kindness of God, peace of mind, tongues, steadfastness, and humility. Wonderful things.

Several years before Mr. Armstrong died, they had a cruise over to Corinth. We had never been on one; our kids were grown up, and we had a few dollars put aside, so we went on the cruise over there. We learned interesting things just from being in Corinth. Our guide told us it was a very sexually oriented country. The prostitutes ran the country. When you came into town, they told you if you had money to go to the house of ill repute, and if you did not, go to the library. They had a very famous library. The ladies of the night ran the city, and the reason they did is because they slept with all of the leaders, with the ships' captains that came in, and with everybody else. So they knew where to invest their money.

As we went into the gift shop, they still sell articles today that are strictly sexual. I will not describe them to you, but I was surprised. That is the city of Corinth, and the environment is frankly a lot like what we have. I could not help but think, it is just like the cities we have today.

Granted, in Paul's time, there were no automobiles and airplanes, computers or TVs, or any of the other things that we enjoy today, but the people, the political leadership, was crooked, and religious authorities were crooked, just as they are corrupt and power hungry today. Nothing has really changed.

We moved out of Los Angeles to the town of Bolivar, a little town of 10,000, from a town of 22 million people. We thought of peaceful thoughts, and things like this. Computer, internet, movies: it is all there in Bolivar, too.

So we are going to read some more about what was given to the Corinthian people that were called by God.

I Corinthians 1:18-21 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing [And that is true.], but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world [Yes, He has.] For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

I told one man, "Christmas is pagan." And he said, "Well that is just too bad, that is how I worship God." What do you say after that? Nothing, nothing.

I Corinthians 1:22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom.

Jews want a sign, some miracle, and the Greeks wanted philosophical wisdom. Paul brings out that men, by their own wisdom, would never be able to understand what had taken place. It was only by being called by God, which each of us were—we have to remember this—called by God. In the same

fashion, we are being called out of an unbelieving world today, so we are saved. We have to remember this.

The Jews request a great miracle, and the Greeks reason based on philosophy, thus they cannot see Jesus Christ, no matter what happens.

I Corinthians 1:23 But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness . . .

The idea of a Jew being crucified to save somebody is just ridiculous to them.

I Corinthians 1:24-28 . . . but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise [I can vouch for that.] according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. [We have a few, but not many.] But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen [That should make you feel good.], and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are [We have a future that is just exciting, it truly is.], that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption [This is all coming from Jesus Christ for us, we are special. I hope you really appreciate that.]-that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.”

God has chosen those who are considered foolish. My neighbors look at me, I moved into Bolivar and was there two weeks. The neighbor across the street said, "Hey, you go to church on Saturday, don't you?" "Yup." That is the last she ever said about it. We are still friends, I tell her my jokes.

I trust this does make us consider and feel good about our calling, and not feel remote from the world, even though we are. We have the truth, and they do not, and they are not going to have it until the right time comes. All of this was done, that we are considered so worthless in what we stand for, it will confound and humble the wise in the future, and they will be glad for that.

Do we ever stop and consider how special we are? I do not think we do. I think we go on in our lives, just day after day.

I Corinthians 2:6-16 However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. [That is what we are getting. The information that we get is not from this world.] But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” [And you and I, I trust, love God.] But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. [That is how special we

are.] Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For "who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?" But we [We, who have been called by God.] have the mind of Christ.

We have had a lot of concern in this Feast for John 6:44, and that made me smile, because I often think how I was called, it was very unusual.

John 6:44 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day."

The word *draw* is used six times in the New Testament. It is used here as an influence from God, an influence to pay attention to something different that we had never seen before, to secure a desired result. Twice it is used to show Paul and Silas as drawn into the marketplace, and twice the drawing of nets, and in John 12 Jesus says:

John 12:32 "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself."

When was I drawn? This may sound foolish, but I think I was the only one that was drawn by this means. Sitting behind my machine gun in Korea, 1951, and all of a sudden a copy of the *Stars and Stripes* came. In an article written by Clare Booth Luce, who as a member of the House of Representatives, and later our ambassador to Spain, had big headlines: Christmas is Pagan. I started to wonder about that. I had gone to Sunday school—it was not much, it sort of ruined a good day—but I did not give it a thought.

So I started to think about it. It was 16 years later that I was baptized. But what it started in me was that one question: what does the Bible say? Not what does the minister say, my mother say, a neighbor say, or anything else. What does the Bible say? I started to hear Mr. Armstrong. I married Dolores, and we got a house. In 1966 we were baptized. I never forgot that. I honestly think, and you may not think this way, that in all of the publications that went out, that was put there for me. Not that I am a genius or anybody special, but that called me, it made me think, and I never quit thinking about it, even though we had time go by.

When Jesus used the term *draw* I thought of a fishing reel. I used to go deep sea fishing a lot, and the fishing reels had what is called a star drag. It lets you tighten it or loosen it. The fish in this case was a salmon, but you have the brake on it. He runs and runs until he gets tired, then he starts to come back in. You reel part of it up, then he runs again. He keeps tightening the draw until he is exhausted and tired, until he finally comes to you when you pull him in.

That is how they were drawn; I have no idea how the people in Corinth were drawn. Was it a social thing? I do not know, I have no idea how you were drawn. I do not know if you have ever stopped to think of what made you come to church, or what made you consider this. So that is what I thought of, and that is what I ended up with.

Have you ever stopped to consider what you have been drawn to? This to me is quite interesting. We are called to be the firstfruits of God.

James 1:18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth [By calling us, by getting us interested.], that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

I do not know whether you consider yourself to be firstfruits. I am sure Abraham was, and those who have gone before us, but we are too.

Leviticus 23:17 You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to the Lord.

You are the firstfruits. I do not think I thought how important this was, I just said “OK.” There is a lot more to it than we think. Because we are firstfruits does not mean we can coast. It does not mean that we can feel superior. It means that we have a job to do. It also means that there are some things that we have be careful of, and I am going to touch on those right now. The concept of what is taking place, and I do not think we begin to see it, is awesome. It truly is awesome.

Even though the Father does the calling, and Jesus and the Father see to our teaching, we have an opportunity to respond in effort to work, to become like them. You know what it says in John 17:3, that we are to become like them, that we are to imitate them in every way, their image, “the whole nine yards.”

But the dangerous downside of this calling is that we can consider ourselves special and tend to let down, and just coast. We should be humbled by this, and fight coasting with everything we have, thinking we are for some reason superior, because we are not. There are a lot of people out there a lot smarter than I am, a lot smarter than you are, too. We are not superior, but we have been given the truth, and we cannot think because we have been given the truth that we are somebody special. We are, but not where we can let down.

James 1:19-20 So then, my beloved brethren [Who are the first fruits.], let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Losing your temper and things like that. We should always be slow to anger, slow to speak. We should be eager to hear, to learn, and to be taught. The attitude of learners is what it is all about, and being instructors, be sure you are taught. This is the attitude we should cultivate, to be taught and to learn from it. We should always be slow to anger and wrath, but in this case, it is the receiving of God’s Word that produces positive, positive change in us.

Therefore, because we have each been called to serve God, we are to lay aside filthiness—and that is used only once in the New Testament—and evil conduct, considered as disgusting or offensive. These things have to go.

James 1:21-22 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only.

You cannot sit, we all have to *do*. I have been at this 47 years, John Ritenbaugh has been at it for 50-something. And we get tired and worn after a while. But we all have to continue to do.

The overall concern in this society is this: we have to be careful what we allow into our mind. It is absolutely necessary to be cautious about that. We are to open our mind and heart to instruction and the truth of God. We have to be very careful about what is on the television, the computer—everything that is wrong is right at your fingertips. It is this power of learning from God and obeying Him that can save us.

Be you doers of the word—do not allow yourself to be fooled by thinking that knowing it is all that is needed. It is doing that is required.

James 1:23-24 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away . . .

James brings out here that the intent of this is that when you observe yourself, do not do it casually. Do it closely and very carefully in the mirror. See what you are really doing. This is not the time to goof off. It just is not.

James 1:25-26 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue . . .

He deceives his own heart. You have to be careful in every area that you are in.

James 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans . . .

To visit your neighbor. We have a neighbor who will not visit us, but we go visit him. He and his wife are sick all the time, we go just to say “hi.” The neighbor across the street cuts his lawn. Do something like this, do something different that you are not used to.

James 1:27 . . . to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

This is what our job is.

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

Interesting verse. What is this race that we are running? We have all heard the scriptures and messages, and I am sure we all picture the race. Paul is describing the race that the people could relate to. The key for us in this race is that we have to realize that it is an individual race, it is not a collective race. It is not a church race. It is us, individually. Do we obey? Will all of us be in the Kingdom? I do not know, I trust that we will. But it is an individual race. In a true sense, it could be said that Satan and this world is who we are racing against. It is just that simple.

In the first part of I Corinthians 9, Paul stresses how he could have demanded tithes or monies from those he taught, but that he went through hardship that he might be able to teach them about God,

without having to ask them for help. He stresses that we are all running the race, and those that are in the games run for a wreath, and they run for something to hang on the wall. I have done that, I won prizes; they are somewhere in the house.

The race that we run, and the prize that we are after, is a crown of gold and the awesome future that comes from that. The Feast to me is always a time to remember these things. I think frankly that if we did not have the Feast we would not have much of a congregation after several years.

In I Corinthians 9:25, everybody who competes trains to exert himself, to control at working to win the race. Those racing train for a perishable crown. But we, as the firstfruits, train for the gold crown that never perishes.

I Corinthians 9:26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty.

Paul had to fight, all of the fights that we talked about in Corinth: prostitutes, all of this type of thing.

I Corinthians 9:26 Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.

He does not shadow-box. He is serious about the fight that he has to fight.

I Corinthians 9:27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection [That is not easy.], lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

When that time comes, it is too late. I used to teach shooting, and I said the moment you pull the trigger, you cannot take it back. There is something like that for us here.

As I mentioned earlier, Corinth was a lot like our nation, minus TV and the internet. They continually pulled at Paul and all that were called. It was not easy, just like it is not easy today. Thus we see in verse 27 that Paul worked in bringing his body under subjection, that it might approach the character of God. You read about that again in John 17:3.

Who is the first of the firstfruits?

I Corinthians 15:20-25 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep [Who have died.]. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming [That is you, I hope.]. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.

So Christ is the first of the firstfruits.

Revelation 14:1-5 Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand [This is men and women, just in case there is a little male chauvinist here.], having His Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one

could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.

I do not think that I ever thought of myself as being among the 144,000, but that is what it says here. The firstfruits will be among God.

As for being virgins, let me cover that. It is mentioned here that they were not defiled by women, that they were virgins. It would seem that every commentator has his own viewpoint, almost all wrong. If they had been physically virgins, there would be no Peter and his wife, and the other apostles, or the people that had wives or husbands.

II Corinthians 11:1-2 Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me. For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

How did this occur? What happened?

Revelation 14:12 Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

These people worked to keep the commandments, as you do, I trust. This is part of how they became virgins again. They changed all their old ways, to the ways that we should be right now.

A friend of mine, an elder in COGWA, once said, “You know John, if the world kept the Ten Commandments, even the last six, if everybody kept them, there would be peace throughout the world.” And that is true.

Brethren, who are you? Are we special? Does the world around us look at us as being anything special? Not hardly! Do we still fight to overcome, and raise our families? Do we stumble sometimes, do we do things that we wish we had not done? As was mentioned, do we have to apologize and quit that? But who are we, really?

You are so important—I do not think you really know it, and I know that I did not consider it.

Matthew 24:21-22 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be [And here comes the bombshell that should make us all pay attention, and consider who we are.]. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake [Who is the elect? You.] those days will be shortened.

Now granted, there is Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, all of the earlier people—but it is also us. As we live and develop ourselves to become like God, we become the elect. Because we are truly working to please God and to stand for what is correct, this world is not destroyed, because of your efforts, and those that have gone before I must add. We individually are so prized by God that the days, if not shortened, would lead to the destruction of all of mankind.

But because of those who have gone before, and you heroes, which is what you become, with your striving to overcome, much of this world is going to be saved because of you. They may laugh at you in the beginning, and all that you believe now, but it is going to pay off in a way that they have never ever foreseen.

What is the reward for you of all of this? Revelation 20:4-6, you will rule with Christ for a thousand years. Revelation 5:10, you will be kings and priests on the earth, you will be able to teach and to help all of mankind to live together at last.

So brethren, it is going to be tough in the end. I gave a sermon sometime back on pioneers that crossed from the East Coast to the Willamette valley. It was a smooth transition until they came to the gorge before the valley, and then it became pure hell. Brethren, we are going to have a tough time, there is no question about that. But if we do our job with Christ, if we do all that has been taught here, we will be able to come through it.

So brethren, get busy.