

Handwriting On The Wall (2015)

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Given 27-Sep-15; Sermon #FT15-01

We are going to begin this sermon in the book of Daniel. This sermon series that I have been going through every Feast of Tabernacles for about the last ten or twelve years, has become my custom to begin the Feast with.

Daniel 5:1-9 Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand. While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which had been in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone. In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other. The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers, and the king spoke, saying to the wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." Now all the king's wise men came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation. Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished.

This is that event that took place from which the phrase, "The handwriting is on the wall" has become a byword for the whole English-speaking world. It represents something that showed a great deal of portent within the message that was written, or in another case it could be looked upon as something that occurred and that everybody knew occurred, but they said they should have known it was going to happen because the handwriting was on the wall.

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I have used this in times past in which I have usually reported on some trend that is in the news, happening in the country, in which it shows great portent to it. That it is heading the country toward a disaster and we better be warned that such a thing is occurring and make preparations to make sure that we are ready when it does occur.

I have deviated somewhat and I no longer go into single events. I do not want to concentrate on events and actually detract from what the Bible is really saying regarding watching world news. Even though I still titled these opening sermons as being handwriting on the wall sermons, they are usually on bigger topics now than they used to be and I am not concentrating on one or so kind of events.

I want you to go with me to Deuteronomy where I am going to spend a lot of time.

Deuteronomy 31:9-11 So Moses wrote this law and delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel. And Moses commanded them saying, “At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing.”

This year is somewhat more special than a normal Feast of Tabernacles because, as best as we can tell, we have just completed the seventh year of a cycle on the Hebrew calendar. Thus until shown otherwise we are following this command to the best of our present understanding. We have just read these verses from the New King James version, but it reads differently in the King James Version by one significant word.

The King James Version reads in the one phrase, “In the solemnity of the year of the release.” The King James Version is not technically correct, the New King James version is technically correct in this case by saying, “at the appointed time.” I do not know why the King James Version translators did that, it certainly was not because they did not know the technical meaning of the Hebrew word, they knew it well. The Hebrew word is a common one used fairly frequently in the Bible. It is the Hebrew word “moed” and it literally means appointed time. Sometimes it is even translated as festival.

I believe the King James translators caught the way the Jews translated it in the Hebrew Bible, or an alternative might be that they translated that the way the Septuagint translators rendered it in the Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible. It is entirely possible that the King James Version translators believed that they were helping the

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readers capture the essence of a very special occasion by inserting the word solemnity.

Solemnity indicates an occasion that is serious, weighty, dignified, full of importance, and grave. Consider this: this occasion only happens once in seven years, and in addition to that, it is observed after a very significant year, the year of release, was ended. That is two occasions that are different than an ordinary year.

On top of these two significant truths was the most important fact of all—that was, God Himself was going to be present. Is not God present at all of our services? We are not talking about the Church of The Great God, or the church of God, we are talking about Jewish services, or Israelite services, back when they were using the Temple.

Turn to Deuteronomy 16. The Feasts were not always the quite the same for those people under the Old Covenant.

Deuteronomy 16:13-16 “You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your manservant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who are within your gates. Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to the Lord your God in the place which the Lord chooses, because the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice. Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God in the place which He chooses; at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed. “

The significant difference was also present in what we read in Deuteronomy 31. The men were there. The men were not always exactly where the Feast of Tabernacles was being held in such a manner. This is because the males were not invited to attend on those other times, and it is possible that not necessarily females either. What did they do on those four other feasts? The feasts, other than Pentecost, Days of Unleavened Bread, and Tabernacles, they kept locally, in a local synagogue, like we do, except for the Feast of Tabernacles.

Why did God do that, that there were only three feasts a year that the men had to make the trip to the Temple, in Jerusalem or in Shiloh? The reason is an act of mercy on God's part because they had to walk everywhere they went, unless they had a donkey. Not only that their occupation as farmers and herders, in all that walking they lost a

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great deal of time that they ordinarily would have been working on their land or in their herd.

God gave them a break but in that seventh year after it ended, the instructions that we read in Deuteronomy 31, when all of those factors came together, it made for an occasion that was more solemn than even a regular Feast of Tabernacles. All those significant things came to together.

The reason that the King James translators did what they did and inserted a word that was not actually in the Hebrew, is because they wanted to draw attention for our benefit that we would recognize that these particular Feast of Tabernacles were unique in the sense that they were only a once-every-seven-year event.

As far as we know we are keeping such an occasion at this time, where all of these significant things have come to a head and here we are.

For the serious-minded Israelite all of these factors added to the weightiness of this particular meeting and there was nothing at all insignificant about Deuteronomy 31:10. We will add to this. Please turn to Amos 3. If an Israelite was up on his history, the covenant that the nation entered into with God, then he would be moved by what it says here.

Amos 3:3 Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?

Would he be walking together with his God? It also says in this book, in verse 2,

Amos 3:2 “You only have I known of all families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for your iniquities.”

The word ‘known’ has sexual connotation to it. It is indicating a union in marriage. Of all the nations on earth Israel was the only one that God entered into that special relationship with. That adds to the solemnity for that Israelite who understood some of the significance of that. He would have to reach the conclusion that of all nations on the face of the earth, again in this seventh year, it was significant because not only was God going to be there, but He was going to be with the only nation on earth that He has actually ever made a covenant with.

All of those things are part of the thought that is at the base of Deuteronomy 31:9-11.

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Being with God right in His very presence brings people together, so what we see in this verse are all the significant events coming together at one point of time. Keeping God's festival, in God's presence, helps one stay in agreement with God, and with each other. Symbolically that is walking with God and that is why I believe that the King James Version translators used the term solemnity.

We are going to move this to the end time and this will become more important with the sermon that I will be giving tomorrow afternoon. There is one thing I want to concentrate on, and that is Matthew 24:36-39, so that we have the right attitude about this solemn occasion, the times we are living in, what lies ahead, and what is happening right now.

My special concern is for the United States of America and the circumstances that we see happening as we deteriorate morally, ethically, just about everything you would never want to see happening *is* happening.

Matthew 24:36-39 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days of the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be."

In mid July Richard and I had the opportunity to travel to Britain and to spend the weekend with those folks that meet with us there. We had the opportunity while there to spend a bit of time visiting two museums, one was the Winston Churchill War Museum, the other was the British Museum, and both of them were very impressive. As impressive as the British was, the one that impressed me the most was the Churchill War Museum. One of the reasons it impressed me so much is because I was nine years old when United States began participating in the Second World War.

By the time the United States began participating in it Britain had already been at war for a little bit over two years. Visiting this particular place was meaningful to me because that was the command center for Great Britain as they were fighting that war against the Germans.

That was the command center where Winston Churchill directed those who were bringing him information about what was going on in Europe, what was going on here, there, and everywhere. So Richard and I spent several hours reading much of the material that each display and also the historical artifacts had with them as well.

The museum is housed in the actual edifice from which this was done, and it reminded me of something when I read a particular paragraph or so under something that was there. One of the reasons why this was so meaningful to me is because I really followed the Second World War zealously in the newspaper, every day without fail.

By the time that America officially got into the war, the newspapers were filled with pictures and stories. This two or three sentence statement really caught my attention. It was a statement about why that particular location was chosen by the Brits to fight the war front. The very nerve center of Britain's war center was located in a truly cramped basement of an already existing government office building in London.

They truly made do with what was inadequate but it was at least available. They made it work. Even though this operation center existed when the war began, it was hastily thrown together and it had usually somewhere near a hundred people working there—men, women, and children—each shift. Even though it was lacking things toilet facilities, even Mr. Churchill had to use a chamber pot. It was not like the plush operation centers that America had where we were not bombed, they were making do with what they had available to them at that time.

When Britain's active participation in the war began, despite that the nation had been warned for years from multiple sources, including from Winston Churchill himself, of what Hitler and the Nazi's were planning, the British government was not really prepared. I will tell you why. I do not mean that the military wing of the British government had done nothing, but the scope of what was needed to be done to fight a war of the magnitude of World War II, had clearly not been addressed.

In Matthew 24:39, Jesus is saying that the date of His return has not been given from God to mankind at all. Nonetheless we are warned already that it is coming, how far away it is we do not know. The message there is be ready whenever it happens.

There is a logical reason for the Brits lack of preparation. If we were in the same circumstance we would do the same thing. This is the reason that my concern is about us: dictatorships prepare for war through a corrosive fear placed on the citizen by their own government, thus the citizens give their cooperation to protect themselves from their own government. First of all, dictatorships can act and react quickly. By way of contrast, democratic republics such as the Israelitish people generally have and that includes the Brits and Americans, give their citizens much greater freedom to choose whether they will cooperate.

Democratic republics must build consensus within its population by means of appeal

and propaganda. The building of that consensus usually moves about as slowly as molasses in January.

Democratic republics very frequently must be attacked first before they react. The reason they are so slow is that each individual must willingly give his cooperation. Israelitish governments tend to be much closer to the model that God gives in His Word than dictatorships. That is the reason for this message.

The Church of the Great God, and the church of God in general, is striving to implement the form and practice of God's government as shown in His Word. God's government is not coercive, so the Church of the Great God's ministry teaches, telling what we believe is true and what we believe your response should be. The ministry does not mess with your life. You as a free moral agent must choose to voluntarily conform in the church.

Virtually the entire weight of responsibility for a life of faith is on you, the individual. Each converted person must understand and act upon the fact that the church cannot save anyone, neither can the ministry. It is God who saves. He is the ever-present factor in our life and what matters is your relationship with Him combined with His grace.

I am going to appeal to you. There are just two aspects of Matthew 24 that I want to expound on. The first is verses 36-39, which sets the stage for Jesus' warning. He draws His illustration from the time period before Flood.

The first thing that Jesus teaches in this section is that it pleases the Father not to give us a date for Christ's return. He wants to know—do we really love Him? Do we love His way of life? Are we willing to respond to what He has offered us in a way of eternal life? He adds that it is not even revealed to angels, who are intimately involved as ministers to the righteous, who undoubtedly feel very sympathetic to us as we struggle in our lives. They might yearn to give us hope but they cannot help in that way.

We must, by faith, trust that what God is doing will yield greater blessings than if He decided to tell us. His way is always the wisest course of action but doing it this way always creates the potential hazard that I already covered. It is the hazard of being distracted by what is going on around us. It is the hazard of caving into and submitting to the spirit of the times that we live in.

Jesus tells us that despite the tenor of the times, that as the days before the flood, people were deeply involved in marrying, eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, building, and harvesting. Is there anything evil about any of it? Not on your life! They are normal, everyday things. What was the problem then? That is what their *focus* was on!

Jesus is not telling us to avoid all of these things that are part of a normal life, He wants to know what our focus is on.

He says right in Matthew 5, let your eye be single, be single minded. We go through the normal routines of life, but that is not where our focus should be. Our focus is on God, His Kingdom, and if our focus is really there because we love Him, then we will do the right thing and we are going to do everything on in our power to please Him.

That was what was wrong with those people. Did they have the truth? Please turn to Genesis 6. What it says is what this nations is moving toward.

Genesis 6:5-6 Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

I do not believe that we here in the United States are in this state yet that he just described there in verse 5. I think that we are certainly moving in that direction. These people went on as though what was going on maybe not very far from them was not occurring. They simply did as they always did and as their ancestors did before them.

Do you understand that God is not only fair in His judgment, He is also merciful and faithful? They did this even though God made sure that there was a witness being made to them of what was coming. The ark was being built and Noah was clearly identified in the New Testament as a preacher of true righteousness. There were people who lived near where Noah was building, they saw the ark and he was preaching to them. "What are you doing that for, Noah?" And he would tell them.

But I want to stretch this out a little bit further. Noah was preacher of righteousness. Is it possible that he was only anchored where the ark was? It took him and his workers one hundred and twenty years to build that thing. They could have built that thing and carved all the boards out and everything, that is why it took so long. You and I do not know that, we do not know what kind of tools those people had to work with. I am thinking each one of those people lived six hundred, seven hundred, eight hundred, nine hundred years before they died, that is a lot of time to learn from God's creation.

They may have had electronics. Do you know there is a verse in the book of Deuteronomy where God says to these people, gather those people who are scattered out in the heavens. Does that mean that they shot rockets out there and some of them

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got lost? I am not kidding you! It is in the book of Deuteronomy. The verse gives you the impression they are stranded out there, circling like a satellite around the earth.

Look at how much has been developed in the last one hundred years that you and I take for granted. Automobiles, airplanes, blasting things off into outer space—all of this in the last one hundred years and those people lived lives that were nine hundred years long. How long was that preacher of righteousness preaching to those people maybe world wide?

That is how merciful God is. A hundred and twenty years of a witness made before the hammer came down. God tells us in Romans 1:18-20, that those people are without excuse. God was fair. He did not condemn them to drowning for nothing, they were guilty and they rejected the preaching of His evangelist, Noah, and Noah's family.

Matthew 24:42-44 “Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him.”

The term watch means to be on alert, it includes being aware of what is going on in the world, but the term in that context more certainly means to be keenly aware of our spiritual standing and responsibilities to God and His purpose.

No one can do that for us, we have to do it ourselves, being alert, watching. Being alert to our condition, being alert to applying things to God's way of life. It means making sure our attention and our efforts are on the right things pertaining to our spiritual responsibilities to our Father, our Savior, and to our brethren. It means paying attention to prayer, study, overcoming, self-examination, repenting of sins, glorifying God by means of our life. It means doing as Jesus Christ taught in Matthew 6:22, making sure that our eye is single. It means that our life is going to be spent in sacrifice.

The focus of our life is clear. It should be deliberately directed toward the goal that God called us to. Those people before the Flood were not without a witness to alert them of what was coming, and yet the people did nothing. Why? One major reason was that they were caught up in the zeitgeist, the spirit of the times. That influence is hard to resist but we have to make sure that in our life we schedule God in frequently.

Our course is clear. We must make a deliberate plan of action to prepare ourselves, and

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properly adjust our pattern of life to the warnings given by Jesus Christ for our times.