

Looking Back To The Future

Staying On the Right Track

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I went back to a sermon on Sabbath, in Acts 9, I cannot remember the verse right now—it was a scripture that said great peace settled on the churches in Judea and Galilee. People were walking in the fear of God and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. The sermon went on to talk about how the Feast of Tabernacles is a time of vision. Our vision will give us a measure of the right kind of respect of God, yet we are also comforted because of the things we know, the things that He is going to work out in our lives and other people's lives as well. And even as upset as the conditions have been in the Church of God, there is still nonetheless a comfort that we have knowing that He is going to work these things through, and things are going to work out right.

I thought about the sermon and how we find a portion of the great hope that we have and what we are doing while we are here and in our life, right out to the end of it until Christ returns. We are being prepared to become a teacher, to help straighten the kind of things out that we see in this world—things that do not fill us with very much pleasure.

We would like to get our hands on the situation, but we just do not have the wisdom to be able to do it, or we have not been given the authority to do it. So we just have to wait until that time comes. In the meantime, it gives us a goal. We are being prepared to be a teacher, so we better be yielding ourselves to fulfilling that responsibility.

I showed you last night, that we have been called here to rejoice before God, but we are to rejoice in a certain way—to rejoice within the framework of God's purpose. We know what He is doing and we can rejoice in that even though we are going through all kinds of trials and difficulties ourselves. We may be sober and saddened by what we see happening in the world, yet we can still have a measure or sense of good feeling because we have that picture. So, we can come here and rejoice within the purpose that God is working out.

This morning, the sermon both broadened and sharpened our sense of understanding of the hope that we have before us; we can certainly rejoice in that. I am sure that you are inspired and lifted as I was by having these things repeated to us. He did it in such a colorful, imaginative, and enthusiastic way that who could not be inspired about what is coming and filled with a sense of urgency and responsibility to yield ourselves to this with great hope? So, there are difficulties that are hard to get through, but I am working towards something that is awesome and great, and I want to be there.

Now we have our interest piqued by the sermonette. You begin to see what is happening at the beginning of this Feast. God is emphasizing why we are here. He wants us to catch a picture of His Feast of Tabernacles, and what it means both personally and to the world, and now we see from the sermonette that there are possibilities here that are even far bigger and far greater than we ever imagined.

He has not told us the whole story yet. We have to wait for the Last Great Day for the rest of the story, but that is the way it goes. We get things in bits and pieces. God does not give us the whole load all at once; we probably could not stand it; we could not understand it. We do not have the means to understand it, so He gives us a little bit at a time as we are able to digest it and use it in our lives.

So, even though we repeat these things year after year and hear some of the same things every Feast...if the ministry is on the ball and everybody is praying, new understanding, new depth comes to us, and we are able to see things more clearly. I think that is what He is doing here. He is refocusing us so that we know where we stand. We of course also understand, do we not, that after this there is no excuse. We cannot come to Him and say we just really did not get it. It is being made very plain to us.

I brought this up because I am going to be talking about the Feast of Tabernacles, but I am going to be coming at it at a different perspective altogether. In fact it is going to be a look backwards at the Feast of Tabernacles; by backwards, I mean into the Old Testament, so we can see the emphasis that God put in the Old Covenant.

This, too, is important to us because the emphasis in the Old Covenant deals with what we are today. We have been looking forward to a time that is coming. Now let us look at the Feast of Tabernacles in terms of what it is to you and me today. In order to do this, we have to go back to the Old Testament. We are going to look at our roots. If we understand our roots, our spiritual roots, in terms of the Feast of Tabernacles, then maybe we will be able to make better use of the things that we have been given in the way of vision in these other sermonettes and sermons.

A speaker gets concerned when another speaker uses a scripture that he was going to use and worries that he is going to walk all over the scriptures he prepared for, but God is running the show, we can be sure of that, and every speaker becomes aware of that. We do not collaborate. I ask all the men who are speaking to send me a one or two paragraph summary of what they were going to speak on. My idea in that was not to determine what they were going to speak on; I just want to see that there would be no conflicts and that someone would not be embarrassed if someone else spoke on their subject before they could and would have to throw something together to speak on.

We want you to have a really rich spiritual Feast, so that is why I check the summaries of the speakers, and I could see clearly that the speakers were not going to butt heads, in terms of the subject material. All the speakers were speaking on something that was a little bit different, even though the subjects had to do with the Feast of Tabernacles or the Last Great Day. So the sermonette did not step on the scriptures that I want to use here in Leviticus 23.

Leviticus 23:34 Speak to the children of Israel, saying, the fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the Lord.

Leviticus 23:37 These are the feast of the Lord which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire to the Lord, a burnt offering and a grain offering, a sacrifice and drink offerings everything on its day.

Leviticus 23:40 And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days.

Leviticus 23:43 That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I am the Lord you God.

I gave that summary because I want to reiterate to you that I think, and I know that you agree, that God is very serious about His people keeping the Feast of Tabernacles. However, the appearance—indeed, the command and the seeming emphasis on rejoicing—might make one think of the Feast of Tabernacles in terms of it being a big blast.

Make no mistake. He wants us to rejoice. He commands it just as He commanded us to keep the day holy. Leviticus 23:40 is the very first time in the entire Bible that the word rejoice appears, and it appears in the context of the Feast of Tabernacles.

We understand that He wants us to rejoice with purpose—that is the purpose that He has in mind or we have missed the point of the Feast. He wants us to rejoice within a certain context for specific reasons. He wants us to rejoice with specific aspects of His purpose in mind.

Please turn to Isaiah 5, just to pick up a piece of information that I think will be helpful as I continue to lay the foundation here.

Isaiah 5:11-12 Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may follow intoxicating drink, who continue until night, till wine inflames them [these people are having a blast!]. The harp and the strings, the tambourine and the flute, and wine are in their feasts but they do not regard the work of the Lord nor consider the operation of His hands.

I do not want to press the scripture too far, because the word feast does not necessarily always apply to one of the Feasts of God; it can simply apply to having a big blast, a party, where all kinds of fun and games are being played along with the drinking, so that people are really having fun.

I brought this scripture in because I wanted us to see that it is entirely possible to have what we might consider to be the good things of life as a blessing from God, and that these very things work to obliterate God from the picture.

Did we see that last line of the scripture? These people were having a blast, a good time. They are drinking, but they do not regard the Lord. Is it possible that we can come to the Feast of Tabernacles and be in this kind of a situation, where we have the possibility of having both a spiritual Feast and a physical Feast? Where having a physical Feast obliterates the spiritual Feast, so that we do not regard the work of the Lord? We are rejoicing, we are having fun, but it is not within the context of God's Feast. We are here, but the purpose has been missed.

Let us think back to Leviticus 23:40-43, where the word rejoicing appeared. We are commanded to rejoice. Then in verse 43, the word booth entered in, so we can see that right within the context, rejoicing is seen within the context of living in booths. The Feast is not named the Feast of rejoicing. The Feast is named, the Feast of Tabernacles; it is the Feast of Booths. The emphasis is in the context beginning in Leviticus 23:34, in which the Feast is being commanded and described, and the emphasis is on dwelling in booths not on rejoicing, though rejoicing is seen in the context.

The emphasis is on the booths. It is the Feast of Booths, not the Feast of rejoicing. The focal point of the Feast from an Old Testament standpoint, is that we are dwelling in booths; that is what God wants us to think about—the dwelling in booths. Rejoicing then, though important, is not as important as booths.

If we get this right, are thinking about the booths and what it symbolizes to you and to me, and we rejoice within that context, then the right kind of rejoicing will follow.

This is further amplified in Numbers 28-29. There are the sacrifices that are prescribed for the various Feasts beginning with the Days of Unleavened Bread and continuing right on through to the Last Great Day. Every time a Holy day rolled around, they looked at the list and said, “Well on this Holy day, we have to make “X” number of sacrifices, and they have to be of this particular variety during that particular season.”

What is so interesting here is when you get to the Feast of Tabernacles and count them out—there are one hundred and eighty nine sacrifices prescribed, commanded, for the keeping of the Feast of Tabernacles. That is more than all of the other Holy days combined.

If you know anything at all about what those sacrifices represented, that ought to begin to tell you something about the context of the Feast of Booths. What we are beginning to see is that we are rejoicing with very sobering responsibilities as well—serious ones—that we need to think about.

Remember, a sacrifice is a freely given offering. But the word implies pain—a giving up of something, at least to some degree (the degree is not specified), only it implies that there is a degree of giving up of something. Spiritually it may be giving up of the self. From that we can begin to see, God seems to expect more sacrifice at the Feast of Tabernacles of spiritual things.

We will keep this in a spiritual vein, even though we are talking about something that was a ritualized symbol, still it has deep spiritual meaning. God seems to expect more sacrifice on the part of His people during the Feast of Tabernacles than at any other time of the year.

Remember, we are looking back on the Old Testament perspective, so that we can see where we stand today. How are we to operate within the context of this wonderful, awesome vision we have been given? The world is still here; Christ has not come, so we have to operate here within the context of this world, and booths has something to do with it. The Feast of Tabernacles has much to do with it.

Unfortunately, a number of years ago, in the Worldwide Church of God, it began to be asserted that the Feast of Tabernacles was God's vacation. I know that it was done with good intent. It was done with a good attitude; it has somewhat of the overtones of a vacation. We leave our homes, we travel some place, we live in a place that is not our own, and we are not encumbered by the normal responsibilities of getting up at 6 A.M. and going off to work for eight or ten hours before coming home to be with our families.

Our normal routines are interrupted by going to the Feast of Tabernacles. We have more money than we would normally have during our daily routines. We also tended to be in areas that would be looked upon as resort areas. All these things contributed to looking at the Feast of Tabernacles as being a vacation. I am here to remind you that it has a far greater and higher purpose than that.

“Vacate” The verb form of the word means “to surrender possessions, to set aside.” You vacate an area, you vacate a responsibility. The noun form “vacation” is defined as “an interlude from one's customary routine, freedom from duty and responsibility.” Think about that. The Feast of Tabernacles is indeed an interlude from one's customary routine, but freedom from responsibility and duty it is not. There the vacation picture ends with a thud.

We will go back to the New Testament, to Mark 7. There are ways in which we can observe God's Feast. What I am doing here with this verse is to show an extreme.

Mark 7:6-9 He answered and said to them, well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written. This people honors Me with their lips but their heart is far from Me, and in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do. And He said to them, all too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.

Sometimes we are misled by an honest translation. The interpreters who came out with the King James version, and also the New King James version and many others besides, chose to interpret a Greek word here as hypocrites. I am not saying that is wrong, but more modern translations say that there is an English word that better fits what they feel that Jesus meant. Although hypocrites is not entirely wrong, it does not give as good as a picture, they feel, of what He intended.

The word that they use is the word casuists; the scribes and the Pharisees were casuists. It is not a word that we normally use any more in the English language. A casuist is a person who has difficulty separating. Another way—to make it more clear—would be: a casuist is a person who strains at gnats and swallows camels. A casuist is a person who is rigid and inflexible. A casuist is a person who has to have a rule for everything. A casuist is a person who has very great difficulty with the spirit of the law. A casuist is a person who will argue incessantly over the etymology of a word, and he will miss the intent of what is said.

That is what Jesus was talking about here. These people were casuists—they missed the point. Were they were keeping the Feast? Yes, they were. But they rejected the commandments in the way that they did it. The Feast became to them a formalized, ritualistic system by which, if they adhered to exactly what the letter of the law said, then they could feel free and right before God.

What this sets a person up for is that they could go about with a clear conscience because they have stuck with great rigidity and inflexibility to all their little rules, and all the while their heart is filled with hate, murder, deceit, and lies. That is why He called them whited sepulchers.

That is why I said that this was an extreme, and what the Jews had done, especially the Scribes and the Pharisees, is they had made the commands of God to be nothing more than ceremonial necessities. What they succeeded in doing was obscuring the purpose for the Feast. They still do not get it. The Jews still do not get what the purpose of the Feasts are.

My concern is that we, too, can slide right into this perfunctory, ritualized attitude. We can get to the place where we can say, "Seek you first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you," while all the while we are seeking to promote ourselves into a position of power, or authority, or dominance. We do things for our own advancement, but we know the words to say.

We can say things like: "a day in His courts is better than a thousand," which we might translate into, "Isn't it good to be in the church?"—and all the while at home, we are spending time with Him only when it is commanded, like on the Sabbath. We can show up at services and everybody sees that. It is possible for us to put on our Sabbath smile, and we can shake people's hands and smile and say those things, but during the week when nobody else can see us, our prayers may not take place even at all.

This is what a casuist does. A casuist meets the letter of something and he is rigid and perfunctory in doing that, but he does not seem to understand the relationship with God at all—that he is dealing with a Personality, that he is dealing with a Being, in the case of Jesus Christ, that we are going to marry. We are dealing with a Personality who wants to have us as a friend, who wants to have us as a child. We are dealing with a Personality who wants to marry us, and if we are going to marry Him, would we not be courting Him as He is courting us?

Would we not be doing everything—all the time, as much as possible—we can to please Him? Would we want to spend time with Him, talking with Him, unloading on Him, asking what He thinks about this, letting Him speak back to us? Would we want to do everything we possibly could to conform to what He wants us to be, so we can please Him and He will be pleased to marry us? Casuists will never do that; he does not see it. All he sees is this perfunctory, rigid, letter of the law approach to things, but he does not see the loving personality of this Being.

Now when an event becomes ritualized...we might say that this is part of my purpose in terms of the Feast of Tabernacles...we do not ever want it to become ritualized. That is why God wants us to rejoice *with* purpose, within the framework of an understanding of His purpose—that I have a great and

awesome high calling; I am here to learn; I am here to be prepared; I am here to share life with these people; I am here to give them a good time; I am here to make their life a little bit better; I am here to sacrifice and serve in whatever way I possibly can.

When we begin to do that we can begin to see the personality that is involved, and God's way of thinking. When an event becomes ritualized, it becomes trivialized. It becomes nothing. It leads a person to think that he is okay simply because he is there.

Now of great concern to me in this sermon is that we do not lose sight of God's purpose for this Feast. To reiterate, I am approaching it from a different angle, and we are being fully informed, as much as we are able to contain, about the multiple purposes of God's Feast—each one looking at a little bit different perspective of it.

Mark 4:18 Now these are the ones sown among thorns they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

One of the translations that I read in preparation for this sermon translated that first phrase, “And the cares of this world,” as “anxieties that arise from the times.” Now feed that in—He is talking about things that can turn us away from producing the right kind of fruit.

There is the anxiety that arises from the times. All of us understand that the economy of the United States of America is nothing more than a façade. It is a house of cards, and if somebody pulls out the right card, everything is going to collapse. That is part of the anxiety of the times because we wonder how much longer we are going to have the kind of stability that we have had in the last couple of years, knowing that this condition exists.

We wonder about other things—the health concerns out there. AIDS is going around; we wonder if somehow or another we are going to get AIDS. Are they telling the truth—that it cannot be spread by mosquitoes? That could be part of the anxiety of the times. Something like that can interfere with the production of the right kind of fruit.

The next one is interesting for us in regard to the Feast of Tabernacles. When He says, “the deceitfulness of riches”—most of us are here with a great deal more money than we would have in a month of Sundays at home. If we have faithfully tithed, then we are here with a great deal of money.

One of the problems with wealth is that it gives one a false sense of security. It subtly shifts the emphasis in one's life. We saw a little bit of that this morning, in the conversation that Jesus had with the rich young man. He did not realize that his confidence was really in his money. His confidence was not in God, so that whatever it was that Jesus was going to offer him, even if it was conversion, he turned it down because he felt secure in his money. He could not give it up. It is very difficult for anyone one of us to fight that because it happens so subtly. It begins to take over.

Here we are at the Feast of Tabernacles with all of this money, and it can subtly shift the emphasis of the Feast to the things that money is able to do, things that money can provide with the kind of purchases that one can make to satisfy one's desire: nice clothing, better food, and entertainment that we could not normally afford during the rest of the year.

Even though we do not intend for our thinking to go in this direction, we have to be aware or the money will shift us in that direction, because you see, money demands attention. It is a power that we feel the need to wield. Money needs to be managed; money demands that it be used. What good is it if one has money, if one does not use it? When one starts to use it, where is the mind? Where is the attention? Where is the time being spent?

All too frequently, it is spent satisfying our own desire: shopping, looking for things...even if we do not buy anything, we know we have the power in our pockets to do it. So we look anticipating that there might be something I might buy with it. Before long the money is managing us. We do not like to admit that, but that is what happens.

Here we are at the Feast of Tabernacles; we have all this money burning in our pockets. What are we going to do with it? Now we are beginning to see

some of the responsibilities of the Feast...very subtle, is it not? It is the kind of test that God will give to people of spiritual minds—to see what they are going to do with it. What will His people do with power?

The warning is here for you and me to watch out—it is deceitful. It will deceive us into using it in a way that is not constructive within His purpose; it will deceive us into using our time. I do not want to give anybody on a guilt trip—we are here to rejoice. But do not ever forget God's purpose. Include Him in His purpose within the rejoicing, within the entertainments. Acknowledge the blessing as coming from God—that we are able to do it. When we are out doing these things, let us do it with other people, talking about God's purpose and plan and whatever it is that we are involved here at the Feast, and know that He is a part of our life.

One of these things that money does, and the anxiety of the times, and the desire for other things—all these things together are situations that kind of drum at the mind. It is always on the edge, waiting for an opportunity to come in and take over. Another way of saying it is that it is in our subconscious. It is just there, “Hey, I have the money; I feel good about that.”

It gives us a different attitude, you know. When you do not have the money, you do not think about spending money in the same way as a person who has great bit of it. The thought to spend money or the desire to have it so that you can spend money, if it comes to a poor person (or somebody who is just skimming by, like 99% of us are), what do we do? We simply put it out of our mind. But when there is plenty, then the money takes on a different role.

Most of us do not have to worry about this apart from the Feast of Tabernacles. Maybe for many of us the most merciful thing that God can do is make sure that just barely have enough. It drives us to our knees, it drives us to trust Him to supply the need. It keeps us in the relationship. If He gave us more, we might be deceived into using it in the wrong way, and it would begin to manage us.

Unfortunately, this world seems to ingrain into us the idea that if one gives himself to God, the person will have nothing else. If one becomes a Christian, life will be boring. Perhaps in some ways this might be a Christian's most persistent trial—that is to keep the world from deflecting

Him from His purpose, by making him feel that because he has allowed Christ to come into his life, that now he is living a life in which he has been denied the good things. The apostle Paul, on the other hand, said, “I count all things as loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord.” I think we would have to agree that was a converted mind.

So, God challenges you and me, because He knows that we are going to slip into that kind of thinking every so often. Yes, we are going to go into it, and probably come out of it—most of the time we do. But He challenges us to take up the cross and bear it, even more, stirring the command that we seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. He says, “...and all these things will be added.” I said a challenge and I mean a challenge. Do you understand what He is challenging you and me to do there? He is challenging us to live by faith. And He said, “*If you do, now [He promised it] all these things will be added.*”

One of this world’s evangelists (I cannot remember who it was) said that it takes 5% effort to win a person to Christ, and 95% effort to keep him in Christ and growing. I do not know whether the percentages, the proportions, are accurate. It is the principle that interested me. Sometimes it seems as though being converted, for many people, is nowhere near as hard as continuing in the conversion process—keeping on, keeping on.

There are two closely related reasons for this. Number one is the failure to count the cost at the beginning so that one understands his commitment to Christ. Remember Luke 14:26.

A large portion of the time and in their counseling of people prior to their baptism, they are encouraging people to understand that they are committing the totality of their life for the entirety of their life. And they try to grasp, at least some of that.

You understand and I understand—we have come down the road a long ways since our conversion and baptism, and we realize that if we were able to count the cost fully at the beginning, nobody would ever get baptized. God mercifully withholds that from us. He tells it to us in words, and we read those words, and we say “Yeah, alright, I am committed.” And then a little while later, we say, “What did I do?”

That is one thing. If we are not committed at least to the extent of our ability to understand, then it is going to be very difficult for us to endure for very long within the life of a Christian, because as I said earlier perhaps a Christian's most persistent trial is that the world is always pressing in on him to make him feel that his denial of self is too big of a burden to carry.

Somehow his life has been impinged upon and made so narrow, that he is not really enjoying things the way others seem to be enjoying things. For instance, those homosexuals, if you read the "In Brief," where they went through the obituaries that appeared in the gay newspapers and in the 5,246 obituaries, the average age of death was 41 for a homosexual. They are really enjoying a wonderful lifestyle, dying at age 41. That is not even counting the ones that died from AIDS.

When the trials come up, it is very easy for us to be shifted into the mode that somehow we have been denied. And if our commitment at the beginning is not great enough to carry us through, we are going to have difficulties.

Second reason, the failure to think of the events that one is going through in one's own life in relation to the Kingdom of God. If we do not do this, then we are never going to get past anything more than the surface of Christ's teachings.

The trials that put us into these difficulties, which make us feel somewhat oppressed—these are the very things that if we obey God through them, living by faith, are going to give us the understanding to grasp God's purpose.

If one or both of these is not there, the result is again two extremes. A person will have so many interests in life. If one is not really committed to the Kingdom of God, the result will be that the most important one—seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness—will get crowded out. Or, a person will be so consumed with one single interest (not the Kingdom of God, but some other interest) that it becomes so important, the Kingdom of God gets crowded out.

Frequently that interest, in the case of a man, will be his job, making a living, earning money. The conclusion for this section is: if one does not prioritize

properly, then the most important priority of all is going to be vacated—seeking first the Kingdom of God. That is a choice.

I once read of a school boy who was reading a list of the chief causes of disease among mankind. Because he was looking up things on death, he had to write a paper of some kind. So he was looking these things up, and he was not old enough to recognize a word that appeared in that list of the major causes of death. He thought that he had found a new cause; so he asked his parents what this disease was. He could not pronounce it, so he spelled it, and it was spelled “M-I-S-C-E-L-L-A-N-E-O-U-S. Unfortunately, this is the category that most Christians fall into—the category where so many “miscellaneous” interests in their life crowd out the main and most important interest.

You ought to be able to begin to see in one sense where I am headed, because the Feast of Tabernacles has very much to do with the Kingdom of God. So God makes very sure that at least one time of the year, His people come before Him, and they get filled with knowledge, information, inspiration, vision, enthusiasm, about the Kingdom of God once again, so that person can leave the Feast of Tabernacles and go home once again filled with hope, filled with enthusiasm, prioritizing right and properly with his life from that point on.

Shucking off all those miscellaneous things...though they may be interesting, they nonetheless are crowding out a person's life with time-consuming, distracting things that, though they are not sin, they are nonetheless keeping us from growing.

I know that many, many, people in the Worldwide Church of God, who appear to you and me as though they have lost their way...what I have just talked about is the cause. They are so involved in so many things, they have been distracted from the very reason for which they have been called. They are losing their understanding.

They can no longer come to grips with reality. I mean the true realities. They may be very realistic about carnal things, but the true realities have escaped them. We have been taught to think of a Laodicean as being an apathetic, lazy, good-for-nothing person. That is not what The Bible says. Jesus' own

description states that these people were rich and increased with goods. You do not become rich and increased with goods sitting on your butt doing nothing.

These are people whose priorities are wrong. They are involved in all kinds of miscellaneous activities; they are losing sight of the most important one of all. All you have to do is begin to think of past Feast of Tabernacles, and how long has it been since you have attended a Feast of Tabernacles where you have heard sermonettes and sermons like you have gotten here—about God's Feast, about God's purpose, about the hope and faith.

This breakdown has been going on for quite a period of time. It is not something that suddenly erupted in 1986 when Mr. Armstrong died. I heard Mr. Armstrong with my own ears say that he first saw Laodiceanism come into the Worldwide Church of God in 1969. It began to rear its head. It has been growing and growing and growing. All Laodiceanism is: the world has been invited in the church and worldly activities have replaced the spiritual activities.

These are smart, intelligent people. They are no different from you and me, but somehow or another the true values have escaped their mind, so they are apathetic in terms of spiritual things.

I also saw an illustration I think shows this well in a book called *How to Live 24 Hours a Day*. It is a self-help book. If you read it, you may get something out of it that might be helpful to you.

This one had to do with organizing one's time so that it can be used to the very greatest extent and the most can be gleaned from it. The author of the book, Arnold Bennett, spoke of a seminar that he gave in some city, and there was one young lady in the group that he was speaking to. She must have been really motivated and inspired by what he said. After he was done, she came up to him and she said, "Mr. Bennett, I am going to concentrate," and he said, "On what?" She said, "On lots of things."

Do you realize that when we concentrate on a lot of things, we concentrate on nothing? Perhaps one of Mr. Armstrong's strongest characteristic was also one of his most irritating ones. He was so single-minded that he seemed to blank everything else out.

How many times did he turn back to Genesis 3? He got that stuck in his craw, and for about six years, it seemed, every sermon either started there, or soon after we started, we were back in Genesis 3 once again. Everywhere Evelyn and I went, people would say, "Hey, there are two trees up there." So we would say to ourselves, "There goes Mr. Armstrong." I will tell you, we learned about the two trees.

He was just like a rat terrier in that regard: he would get hold of something and he could not let it go until he drained every bit of teaching that he could possibly see. And every week, he would see some more new teaching there, and he would relate something else to it. I will tell you, we profited from it. If nothing else, we became patient with Mr. Armstrong and maybe patient with others as well.

Deuteronomy 14:22-23 You shall truly tithe all the increase of you grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the Lord you God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstlings of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always.

This is another reason why I said that we should not be in a vacation attitude. We are here to learn to fear. The fear of God is not naturally inborn into human beings; it is something that must be learned. It does not come naturally; it comes only because...I mean the kind of fear that He is talking about here, which, as I described the other day, includes attitudes and feelings all the way from sheer terror to a deep abiding and wonderful reverential respect, honor, and awe for Him.

That is not afraid at all, but warmly comforted in what He is, and what we can become. That has to be learned. It might be easy to be terrified of Him, but to learn what He is, requires a relationship with Him. It requires

obedience to Him. We are commanded to tithe, commanded to keep the Feast, because they are an important processes in being obedient.

Here we come, if we set aside the tithe; we get more to chew on so that it can be put into practice, and our understanding of the fear of God takes on more breadth and depth than ever before.

This experience requires years, and it requires repetition: doing things over and over again until they are deeply ingrained. The Feast is a pleasant interlude in one's annual calendar, but, I think we are learning that a vacation it is not. We are not coming here to rest, but to learn, and that takes effort. This is not a vacation from duty and responsibility.

I can look out there, and I can see your faces, and in most cases I can see your eyes. I can see the expression that is on your face and it is intent. You are making effort to think, to relate, to remember, to categorize, to prioritize. You are trying to get images burned into your mind that you might never forget them.

You are trying to relate what I say, maybe, to experiences that you may have had, so that it becomes a memory hook, so that it can be recalled at another time and used to some profit or value in your life; and when you do that, then God is glorified a little bit more of the mind and the character of God. This kind of learning fits into the fear of God, and that in turn fits into a much greater purpose as well.

Let me illustrate using money how important the Feast of Tabernacles is to God. When I put this sermon together, I was in the Worldwide Church of God, so I am not going to apologize for the figures that I use. I do not know how accurate they are. I do know that they are probably conservative.

Let us suppose that the "work" income in any given year was 160 million dollars. Traditionally, though this fluctuated from time to time, the percentage of that 160 million dollars that was contributed by the membership generally was between 80 and 85 percent. So, we will use the 80 percent, and keep the figures conservative. That means then that of that 160 million dollars, the membership contributed 128 million dollars of that 160 million dollars.

I am going to make an assumption, here, just for the sake of the illustration. Like I said, I am not sure that this is entirely accurate, but I know that I am very close. Let us assume that the amount of the holy day offering, those seven holy day offerings, was 28 million dollars. We are going to subtract that from the 128 million dollars. So we see, then, what we are left with after the holy day offerings is the tithe and the small offerings that are made when people mail in their tithes. That comes from the brethren, and that would be roughly about 100 million dollars.

We started with 160 million dollars, but now, taking out what outsiders contributed and taking out the holy day offerings, we are down to 100 million dollars that the brethren contributed of tithes and offerings.

We are going to take another 10 or 20 million dollars out of that. We want to keep this figure conservative, and we are going to say that about 10 or 20 million dollars was the small offerings that people sent along with their tithes. So a man's earnings, let us say, were 100 dollars for the week, but he wanted to make an offering on top of his tithes, so he then sent 10 dollars; that 10 dollars added to all of those things so that all the totality of God's people now comes to 20 million dollars.

Now we are left with 80 million dollars, one half of the 160 million dollars. We have eliminated everything except the tithes of the people of God.

All that money operates the work for the entire year. The second tithe is also ten percent, and it is equal in quantity to the 80 million dollars. So if everybody is tithing, they have sent in 80 million dollars' worth of first tithe, and they have kept it in their pocket or in the bank, in a savings account, an additional 80 million dollars, which they take out of their bank and put it in their pockets; and for eight days, they spend 80 million dollars.

That is how important the Feast of Tabernacles is to God. He gives His people 80 million dollars to spend in eight, ten, or twelve days. You think He does not want you here?

Of course, we understand that some of that is spent during the days of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost, but that is tiny compared to the amount

spent at the Feast of Tabernacles. I hope that impresses you. The Feast of Tabernacles is one of the most important things in your life.

Please turn to Leviticus 23. You think He does not want us to learn to fear Him? That is a staggering figure

Leviticus 23:40-43 And you shall take for yourselves on the First day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. You shall keep it as a feast to the Lord for seven days in the year, it shall be a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days, all who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths [Here is the reason for the keeping of the Feast of Tabernacles, from an Old Testament point of view.]. That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I am the Lord your God.

Apart from the Feast of Tabernacles, when did the children of Israel dwell in booths? The only time the children of Israel dwelt in booths was when they were in the wilderness. It was in that forty years before God brought them into the promised land. Are we in the promised land yet? Do booths have something to do with what we are doing now?

Booths may suggest to some people privation, as though it indicates a lack of things. Privation is not something that one rejoices over. Booths are supposed to picture something else, not privation.

It pictures impermanence, temporariness. We might call it vanity. He told the people that they were to take, according to the wording here in verse 40, beautiful ornamental trees, leafy branches... If we are to think of these things that they made out of these beautiful leafy branches in the terms as of a motel, I hardly think that you can say that we are here under austere instances. We do not have every one of the comforts of home, but it is nonetheless adequate for the purpose that we are using it here for at the Feast of Tabernacles. Booths are a dwelling for a person who is on the move. The Feast of Tabernacles has something to do with a person being on the move.

I Peter 2:9-12 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.

We are pilgrims. We are a people who are on the move. We are heirs, but we are not yet inheritors. We are not in the land yet, but we are journeying toward it. We are not yet fully saved. A pilgrim is a person who is out of his country. A pilgrim is a person who is in a foreign land. He is traveling through it; he is not intending on making that land his home. He is not intending on putting down roots, but he is heading somewhere else with a definite goal in mind.

A pilgrim is not a wanderer. He may not have a home, but he has a definite goal toward which he is going. It is entirely possible for a person to be a sojourner without being a pilgrim. You can be a person who is blown from pillar to post; that is what these people who have all these “miscellaneous” interests are. They are being blown all over the place, in every direction.

They are not purposely going toward the goal, which is the Kingdom of God. It is entirely possible, though, that a person will never become a pilgrim unless he first becomes a sojourner. Someone who of his own volition, the setting of his will, uproots himself from that which is familiar and heads out into territory not knowing exactly where he is going.

If you are getting the picture, I think you will begin to see and agree, that it will not be very long if he keeps sojourning that somebody is going to show him the picture more and more clearly.

Hebrew 11:8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would afterward receive as an inheritance and he went out not knowing where he was going.

That is the way the journey begins, and so whenever we are baptized, we commit ourselves and we do not fully understand where it is we are headed. We step out on the little that we do understand, and we begin to put one foot in front of the other figuratively as we begin to head toward that goal; and because God is faithful, He begins to fill in the details. First we have to step out. That is what Abraham did, that is what set him apart from other men. He stepped out.

Unfortunately, many have become very familiar and feel perfectly at home in this world, and they are not looking forward to the same things that Abraham did.

Hebrews 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

The booths and Christian life are now coming together in a New Testament setting. But picking up the instructions from the Old Testament, so that the Feast of Tabernacles can not only give us the vision of where we are going, but it can show us what our job is right here and now—to live by faith.

How is Abraham a pilgrim? Abraham journeyed in Canaan, and it was to be his home, but as far as he could see with his own eyes, it belonged to other people. The only piece of land that he ever owned in his life was the burial cave that he bought from Machpelah. That could hardly be called an inheritance.

Abraham, in spite of this, because he lived by faith, knew that someday it was going to be his. He knew that his children were also going to be a part of it so he kept himself from the people of the land. He never allowed himself to put down his roots and become a part of the system.

He never allowed himself to be distracted. I should not say that he never became distracted because he did, but he always recovered. Every once in a while he would get distracted by miscellaneous activities like going down into Egypt and lying about his wife.

We can see that God was able to pull him through in those occasions as well. But he was led by faith to accept his destiny as being in the distant future. And so, long before there was ever a Feast of Tabernacles, there was a man who was a pilgrim.

Long after a period of time when the Israelites actually built tabernacles, booths, Abraham's spiritual children are also pilgrims, walking in a different land, yet still a land that is their own. So, what happened? The belief that Abraham had—this vision of the future—shaped his life in the present while he was walking.

There is the purpose of God's Feast for you and me, today. The vision is sharpened, in order that our lives will be shaped by that vision right now while we are on the pilgrimage. If you believe it, you will live by faith. If you do not believe it, you are going to be distracted and involved in all kinds of miscellaneous things that will turn you away at the worst or will slow you down and hinder your growth, at the least.

Now we have another perspective of God's Feast of Tabernacles. I did want to go into something regarding Psalm 78, but I will not for lack of time. You can read it and get the lesson that is there.

Remember this lesson: The Feast of Tabernacles not only looks forward, it considers the present and how we are to conduct our lives as a result of the vision of tomorrow that we have received while we are here. If we believe that vision, then our pilgrimage will be assured, in that we will keep going in the right direction, toward to right goal, not allowing ourselves to be distracted from the purpose that God has revealed to us.