

Motivation To Endure

Keeping the Goal in Mind

John O. Reid (1930-2016)

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I felt that Charles Whitaker's lead-in to my sermon today, and in the way that he did it, was something that we all have to consider as we leave the Feast of Tabernacles this year. We have an individual responsibility. I stress the term "individual." It is not collective; it is individual. It is your individual responsibility.

There is a seven-word sentence that describes this responsibility: It tells us how we can save our lives; it tells us how we can get and keep salvation; and conversely, it tells us how we can lose it. And, that seven-word sentence is found in Luke 21.

Luke 21:19 "By your patience possess your souls."

When we read over that, we probably had not given it a tremendous amount of thought, but this is Jesus Christ speaking to us down through the years. And what He is saying is, "By your individual perseverance, sustaining afflictions, possess you your souls."

The word, possess, here, means, "to preserve, or to keep." Soul means, "one's life." You have a responsibility. Thus, we might translate this verse as, "By persevering during these trials, you will save your life." You will be saved, for by persevering, preserve your lives. You are required to persevere. That is, do not yield to these calamities, but bear up under them, for he that endures to the end will be saved. You and I have an individual responsibility to persevere—to endure.

There will be difficult times coming upon this earth, and Jesus Christ wants us convinced of the importance that we persevere. That is what Charles Whitaker was talking about—to persevere in the truth.

What calamities are coming?

Luke 21:5-19 Then, as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations, He said, "These things which you see—the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down." So they asked Him, saying, "Teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place?" And He said: "Take heed that you not be deceived. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and, 'The time has drawn near.' Therefore do not go after them.

But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately." Then He said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven. But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake.

But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony. Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost. By your patience possess your souls."

He goes on to say that men's hearts will be astonished, and that they will die, and there will be tremendous things happening that will just simply tear the world apart. And then down in verse 34:

Luke 21:34-36 "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly, for it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch

therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

This, of course, involves endurance.

Now, God allows this to take place for mankind for one reason, and Mr. Armstrong always used to stress it: The world has to come to understand that man cannot rule himself. And so God is going to let this go right to the water.

For us, there has never been a time like this in the church. We have seen many leave their calling, and drift back into the world, and lethargy. Today you see many wandering into this doctrine, or that doctrine, as Charles brought out; this always frightens me to see so many leave Jesus Christ and go do their own thing. The hard part is that there are not any words I can say, or anything I can do to bring them back.

In fact, early on, when we left Worldwide Church of God, and formed Church of the Great God, this couple called. And they said something that probably depicts the attitude of those who are not here. They said, "We would love to come with you, but you are too serious about what you believe." I thought, "Well, isn't that interesting! You're too serious about what you believe. I mean, this is life and death! This is the Kingdom of God."

And so they are letting go of what they believe, but in fact those who endure have a promise in Matthew 24:13 and Mark 13:13, "But he that shall endure to the end, shall be saved." This is our part.

None of us knows what God has in store for us. And when you pray, "Thy Kingdom come, Father," we want the Kingdom to come, but we do not have any idea what is coming between our asking, and when it actually comes.

We all pray that we go to a place of safety, but at the same time, we realize that decision belongs to God. God owns us, and He will use us for His glory, and for our growth and development. None of us knows what God has in store for us according to His love for us.

Endurance is a subject that is spoken on in our sermons, sermonettes, and private conversations. I think that all of us during our quiet moments stop and think, "Can I endure what is coming?" You do not know. When you are baptized, you promised to be faithful. But you do not know what you are promising to be faithful to. We do not know what circumstances are going to come. And the answer to this question, is, "Yes, you can endure! There is no question! You will be able to endure whatever comes." Turn to I Corinthians 10.

Now, Albert Barnes made one of those commentaries that Charles Whitaker was talking about; a very old commentary, back in the 1830s. John Ritenbaugh has commented that they seemed to be so much closer to God. They truly were.

I Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

Albert Barnes has some really encouraging things to say here about this. And I just trust that they will be encouraging to you. His comment on verse 13:

This is a general promise just as applicable to all Christians as it was to the Corinthians. It implies (1) that all circumstances, causes, and agents that lead to temptation or trial, are under the control of God.

You have heard the Sovereignty of God series. If you have, you know this is true. Everything that is going to afflict you is under God's control.

(2) He can check them, He can control them, He can paralyze their influence, or He can destroy them. God has the power to do whatever He wishes. (3) We are to remember, as well, that there are some good reasons why trials are permitted, that it may be in some way turned to His glory, and to our advancement in virtue. God is working in your life. (4) There is an extent to which we are able to resist temptation [there is a limit that we have that can only

go so far] and that limit will be in all cases beyond the point of which we are tempted. He will not allow you to be tempted above what you are able to resist. (5) He reminds us that He is faithful and can be trusted to be our source of strength, and will make a way of deliverance or escape to save us from being entirely overcome.

In other words, God knows the purpose He has for you and for me, and what we are able to endure. And He has entire control of the entire situation, all that can affect us, and He will adapt our trial to our strengths, and He will enable us to bear all trials that come upon us in all we are to go through.

Now, endurance is a topic that the world really appreciates. I mean, they understand its importance. And they recognize its own when they endure. John talked about the Olympic race and the runner who stumbled, and when she got up, the entire crowd cheered—they appreciated her drive.

We also look at the businessman that started from humble beginnings, working night and day, went to school, he put in long hours, and he became a success. And he is the model of all businessmen. "Look at that man! Look at what he accomplished!"

Of course, we can look at what God did to Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong. He started from nothing; he developed the Worldwide Church of God, and we were all called through that organization.

And, of course, I could not help but think of David (when I think of the soldier that takes the hill, all by himself, it is truly wonderful). But I thought of David when he went down to fight Goliath. You can almost picture it on both sides of the valley with the Philistines over here, and there is not a sound; and Israel over there and there is not a sound; except Goliath's stepping. And here comes David down the valley, a small youth, picking up several stones, and before Goliath even lowered his visor, the rock hits him in the head, and he falls, and the crowd roars from Israel's side. They are so inspired by the endurance that was shown by David's perseverance, and his courage inspired everyone.

Brethren, we can inspire others as well by our faith. We can inspire each other, causing each other to endure by our faithful adherence to the calling that we have been given. We can be a light to the world round us.

I worked with a man named John Brody. John was a medic in the Vietnam war. John's helicopter was shot down by the Viet Cong and was captured. He was put into a tiger cage with all the other prisoners. But being that he was a medic, they allowed John to go out and treat the other prisoners. One day, all the men in the compound were lined up, and blindfolded, and put on trucks. And John just knew that they were going to be killed. They took them to this big vacant field. And then he heard the whap, whap, whap of American helicopters. It was going to be a prisoner exchange between Viet Cong prisoners for the men in John's compound.

Now, I had read a book on the Korean War prisoners. And, what struck me was that some of the prisoners who were gravely wounded had the will to live and make it out, and they survived when they should not have had. And other prisoners, who had very minor wounds, just simply gave up and died. And so I asked John once, "Was it this way during the Vietnam war?" And he replied, "Yes, it was." There seemed to be something in the prisoners, though grievously wounded, to stand up and just not die. This does not mean that some were not killed who had that attitude, but there was something special there.

I thought about it, and I put down four ingredients. The first one was hope—hope that the war would end; hope that they would be repatriated. This hope was kept alive in their minds. The second one was faith—likely, in his own ability. "I'm tough like John Wayne!" Or, it may have been faith in God, and they prayed. "Please help me out of this, or get through this." The third one was vision; a goal; the vision or goal of escaping; a better future; being home again with loved ones; escaping the horror of the camps. And the final one was a determination—a mind set—to not give in, to not quit no matter what happens. This mindset produced actions, which we will get to towards the end of the sermon.

Now, these components of hope, faith, vision, and the determination not to give in apply to us in this end time, as well as we determined never to quit the calling that God has given us. Never quit no matter what happens.

Of all the holy day seasons, the autumn holy days do the most for us in this happening. We have the Feast of Trumpets—the return of Jesus Christ. We have the Day of Atonement—being one with God. We have the Feast of Tabernacles—the promises that come concerning the World Tomorrow (which we will look at in a few minutes). And then, we have the Last Great Day when so many things are going to take place.

And these three components—hope, faith, and vision—produced the fourth: the determination and mindset not to give in. And that in turn produces action.

The first one is hope.

Hope is simply the expectation of good. You can have bad hopes, but it is the expectation of good. And of course, this will vary depending on what your needs are. If you are out of a job, you hope for a good job. So hope for it. You have to have a car, you hope for a car. And our needs, at the time of our trials, seem to dictate what we hope for.

Let us take a look at a couple of examples. Please turn to Acts 26. This is where the apostle Paul standing before Agrippa had to declare the hope that was in him.

Acts 26:1-5 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself: "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently. My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own

nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know. They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.”

Acts 26:6-7 (New English Bible) And it is for this hope kindled by God's promise to our forefathers that I stand in the dock today. Our twelve tribes hoped to see the fulfillment of that promise, worshipping with intense devotion day and night. And for this very hope, I am impeached by the Jews.

Paul had a hope—a tremendous hope—that Israel would learn to love God, to understand God, and worship God. And he was looking forward to that time.

Turn to Psalm 16. This is a hope for safety, security, and trust.

Psalm 16:8-11 I have set the LORD always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest [dwell securely] in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

This is the hope that he had. Turn to Zechariah 9. Here, he refers to *the hope* .

Zechariah 9:9-12 "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem; the battle bow shall be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations; His dominion shall be 'from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.' "As for you also, because of the blood of your covenant, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. Return to the stronghold, you prisoners of [the] hope. Even today I declare that I will restore double to you.”

Please turn to Titus 2. This is the hope that we all share.

Titus 2:11-14 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

That is what is being done now. That is the hope we all share.

The second is faith. (You have heard a lot about faith today.) There are two steps regarding faith that we would all take. The first step is understanding faith in the objective sense. It is believing the body of beliefs that we have all been given.

Philippians 1:27 Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.

The faith in the body of beliefs. Turn to I Timothy 6.

I Timothy 6:20-21 O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. Grace be with you. Amen.

And now the final scripture in this section, turn to Jude.

Jude 3 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

I would like to share with you what Albert Barnes had to say about this:

Earnestly contend refers to the Grecian Games, a series of contests where the participants had to fight to hang on, and work hard. The faith once delivered is called faith because it is the cardinal virtue in the system. All depends on that. Delivered to the saints refers to the system of truth which God has made known in His word. Everything which He has revealed we are to defend, we are to surrender no part. It is a body of beliefs.

Now when we come to believe this, as Dr. Maas said, we become proactive. What are we to do with what we have been taught? Act on the teaching we have been given. It is just that simple. It is not complicated. Now we work to forgive others.

Husbands and wives learn to love each other. In know there are conflicts in some of your homes. But if we really believe what God says, especially Ephesians 5, and even if only one partner does it, God will bless them for that. Who knows what the other partner might do. This is "fish or cut bait" time. I mean this is what you are going to do.

And so, we learn to love our neighbors, to love and forgive our enemies, and we do our best to represent God, because we carry His name. Brethren, in short, we obey God in everything we seek.

We have some wonderful examples of those who obeyed God, endured, and persisted, found in Hebrew 11. Turn back there if you would like to. I am going to just paraphrase several of these because when our French translator saw my list, "You have got hours here!"

Faith in the promises of God is exactly what we stand on. That is where it is. And the promises that are of God are the evidences of things we have not seen yet.

In Hebrews 11:7, we have where Noah built the ark. He had 120 years of preaching, and there were no rainclouds in the sky. He trusted what God said. He acted in faith. He was obedient.

Abraham, when God came to him (verses 8-9), went out into a strange country, and he had a great deal to leave; he was very wealthy, he had a position of extremely high responsibility. He had much belief. He obeyed God.

And when Abraham was tested regarding Isaac (verse 17), Abraham had accounted what God said. God had promised him an heir. My children, my progeny will be as the sands of the sea, the stars of heaven. He trusted God. And God said, "Now I know you." And so, God named him, "Abraham, father of the faithful." He obeyed God.

And Moses (verses 24-25) chose not to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and he chose to suffer affliction with the people of God. He trusted God, and chose to belong to God, and His people.

Hebrews 11:32-36 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets [who all endured, all stood fast]: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions [Daniel], quenched the violence of fire [Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego], escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.

Hebrews 11:39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise.

They received a good report as well, brethren, through endurance and perseverance. This is what they did. They had hope and faith in the promises of God, and it gave them a vision, which is the third element. Turn to Proverbs 29 and we will see something that maybe you have not seen before.

Proverbs 29:18 Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but happy is he who keeps the law.

We understand that without inspired revelation, the people cast off restraint, is how that is referred to. And it was interesting—but, at a time when there is definite understanding, such as the time we live in now—a definite understanding of the immediate events that is right around the corner. Keeping God's law provides happiness and stableness. That is what is being said there. In other words, we show our endurance by keeping the laws of God. Never back down.

An exact vision is difficult to come by, we would all like it, we like dates and times and places, but if God gave us the exact date, time, and place of His return, we would not grow worth a hoot. And He would not learn if we would be faithful to the end; we would have our mind set, and behave ourselves properly, especially if we understood it to be December 3 of this year!

Also, growth takes time, and you are being prepared for a wonderful position. It is no small thing. You are not just being called here to save your own skin, but you are being called to rule the universe, and to rule the world, and you are going to have to have training, and you are going to have to have growth, and so am I. I am not anywhere near there yet. And so, this is another reason why we do not have any exact date. He wants us focused on enduring out to 1998 or the year 2000, or if this group or that group does this, but He wants our mindset and our faith built and focused towards the Kingdom of God. That is where it is at. That is what He wants, and that must be our ultimate goal.

I Corinthians 13:12 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

What Paul is saying here is that we have imperfect knowledge at this time, compared to what it will be like in the Kingdom of God. The way we see the picture now is as if we are looking through an old-fashioned window. I think

many of us have done that. You can tell that the sun is up, but that is about all. You can see objects but cannot tell exactly what they are. They do not give great resolution.

He said, we can see a resemblance of the truth, but cannot quite make it out. We can see in part, and that is all. And then he said, but when we are spirit beings, we will see with the utmost clarity. "Now," he says, "I will be able to see."

But Paul was given a clear and a wonderful vision of the Kingdom of God. But even with that vision, he could not relate it to us.

II Corinthians 12:1-4 It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations [a pulling back of the veil] of the Lord: I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven [where God's throne is]. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

Paul was saying that several years after his conversion, he was caught up (14 years prior)—evidently he did not tell very many people—I am sure that the vision was given to Paul as an encouragement to him, because he had tremendous things to suffer and to accomplish.

And he was taken to paradise. Even the word, paradise, does not describe anything sacred. In Sanskrit, it means, "Cultivated, elevated land." In the Armenian it means "the gardener who runs around the house, planting trees." And in the Persian, it just simply means "a garden filled with wild animals."

And he heard an unspeakable law that he could not attempt to, by word, to do justice to what he saw and heard. It was wonderful.

The use of the word, words, implies that he heard language with exalted praise to have these truths imparted to his mind, which he just could not express. It was too marvelous. He could not even attempt it.

Brethren, God knows that we have to have a goal described for us. So, God gives us two visions in the church. I think we tended to like the one for Israel because we are physical. It pictures the quiet farms and gardens, and the peace, and, oh, that sounds so wonderful. But that vision is not totally for us—it is for Israel.

Now, the word vision is from the root that means “to gaze mentally,” “to perceive,” “to contemplate,” “to dream,” or “have a revelation.” And this dream is to cause us to move forward, rather than saying, “This is so hard.” The dream and the visions that God gives us causes us to say, “I don’t care how tough it is, I’m going to go for it. What a wonderful future we have in front of us.” Just really exciting!

The apostle Paul had this approach. We will spend a little time in Philippians 3. Maybe we can learn something here that is encouraging. Paul did a wonderful example here.

Philippians 3:11-15 If, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.

Paul said something here that should inspire each one of us. He said, “This one thing I do.” There was one thing in Paul’s life, and that was the Kingdom of God. Paul did not try to syncretize the world with the calling he had been given; he did not try to get rich and somehow work the calling in; he did not try to satisfy the world with the way he lived; but he did strive for the Kingdom of God. Paul was single-minded in his purpose for life; and for us it should be the same. None of us can accomplish much of anything if we try to do everything. That is a fact.

We are to be single-minded in our calling if we are to win the race, and we are always to have the object of our purpose for living in the forefront of our mind. That is what God expects of us.

Paul went on to state that he forgot those things behind, alluding to the run of a race, which meant, "Don't waste your energy looking back at those behind you." When you are straining to win, you should be concentrating on the finish line, and not breaking your stride by looking behind you. When you look back, you take your eyes off the goal (the Kingdom of God). We cannot see what we saw before.

Paul did not stop to consider all the trials he had been through, and the rocky ground he had covered, and he had not stopped to consider all the problems that he might have in the future. He kept his mind on the crown that was waiting for him. That is what we should do as well.

With us, sometimes, we can think back at all the shortcomings we possess (I think I have two barns full of flaws), the wrong deeds we have done.

Paul had several problems. He was extremely well thought of, he had accomplished a lot as a Pharisee. And then on the other side of the coin, he had held the coats while one of God's people was being stoned. He put God's people in prison. He might have had some of them killed. If Paul had decided to look back, he could have been despondent, and given up. But he did not do that.

Satan, of course, is going to put thoughts to dishearten and discourage us; if we were faithful, or our lack of love, concern, and speech we made with our mouth (I made a bundle of those), and our lack of prayer sometimes, our lack of study, our lack of zeal, and all these proddings by Satan to think that we are not worth much, saps the Spirit of God from us, and cause us to lose heart.

Paul certainly remembered his mistakes, and he learned lessons from them, but he never allowed them to slow him down for the Kingdom of God.

What can we learn from this? We cannot win this race by looking back. We may as well get that off your mind and press forward. Paul said he reaches

for those things before him, just as the runner stretches to break the ribbon at the finish line with his chest, and he strains for it, that he might attain the prize, which in this case is: the high calling of Christ, the Kingdom of God.

That is our goal; that is our calling. That is to be what we are to strive after. This is the attitude that we are to have in this calling we have been given. In addition to what God has given us, what will the Kingdom be like, what are we stretching for? We can have some idea, we cannot see clearly, but we can have some idea of the wonderful future in store for all of us by thinking back on the wonderful times we had in this life, where we have been given fine family outings, wonderful experiences with our children, the joy of a spring day, a feast, a good shelter, and a fireplace at night on a rainy day, you could then share with friends like here at the Feast where we all sit and talk, thrilled to be with each other.

And a wonderful sense to be needed, the feeling of continuous positive accomplishment as we fulfill the goal God has set for us to fulfill.

In the Kingdom of God, we are going to have times like this forever, not just for eight days. And even though we do not have the ability to see clearly what God has in store for us, we do have God's Word through His prophets as to what times will be like for Israel, and events will be like for us. God knows we are finite, we need something physical to look at, we need word pictures we can relate to. We need to hear the descriptions of what God is planning to do because God cares for us greatly. Please turn to John 15 where He shares His plans with us.

This has been covered, but I want to go over it again. I think we have to realize how special we are to God:

John 15:11-15 "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you."

We are not in the condition of slavery. A slave does not know what the overall plan of his master is. He just knows what his master said to do. However, it is the privilege of friendship to be made acquainted with the wishes and the plans and the desires of one's friend. That is what friends do. Jesus knew He was going to die in sacrifice, and His disciples were going to be left alone. He wanted to comfort them. So He told them what was going to take place. And He knows that we all need to understand His plans for us; for all of mankind, that we might be encouraged at this end time for His friends. We alone understand what God is doing. We understand who we are, we understand God's plan. It is absolutely marvelous.

Looking at God's plan, one of the first things to happen will be Matthew 24: 21-22. It is going to be the war to end all wars. I have heard that slogan for so many years.

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 unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.”

Do you begin to see the value, because you endured, because you are the elect, because you persevered? God is going to cut those days short. You are going to save lives just by your perseverance.

Yes, the vision for physical Israel; after those days are cut short, God will start to bring the peace to all the people. Justice which has been so lacking in this society, will prevail in the Kingdom of God. To be fair and true every time under God's rulership. No longer will those that cheat, steal; no longer will gangs kill and break into homes, who rape, and steal will not be allowed anymore. The very nature and fabric of society will be changed until even the animals who are vicious will have their natures changed and live in harmony with men. It will be a truly wonderful time. (Isaiah 35).

As a boy growing up in the 1930s, in terms of healing people, they did not have artificial limbs. I remember seeing people on little square skateboards, with two wooden pushers, and they would push their way up the sidewalks,

and they would beg. We took our kids down to Tijuana, had not seen those things for years, but they had the same conditions still, begging just for whatever they could get.

We had what we called during those times, "spastics." You could see them at the park, because there were no [special] homes for them; these children were imprisoned in their body, but their mind worked. We had two in the church we belonged to at the time. One's name was Jeremy.

I also remember that one of the people who worked for us had a boy with Down Syndrome. And he asked me (I was in food service) to call on The Good Shepherd home. This home I guess had about 150 older children with Down Syndrome. The first thing I saw when I pulled onto the property was huge diapers on the fences. Not diapers like you put on babies, but giant diapers because these children were incontinent, they had no control. When I walked inside, they were so loving and kind, and wanted to touch me, and I tried to teach them something about food service.

What a time it will be when all who are hurt mentally, or crippled, are going to be healed. And how wonderful it will be for all of Israel be healed in every aspect, not just from the conditions I just mentioned, but from the wounds of war, the effects of disease, and the effects of this society. What a wonderful time that will be.

Isaiah 61:1-11 "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified."

And they shall rebuild the old ruins, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the ruined cities, the desolations of many generations. Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks,

and the sons of the foreigner shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers. But you shall be named the priests of the LORD, they shall call you the servants of our God. You shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory you shall boast. Instead of your shame you shall have double honor, and instead of confusion they shall rejoice in their portion. Therefore in their land they shall possess double; everlasting joy shall be theirs.

"For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery for burnt offering; I will direct their work in truth, and will make with them an everlasting covenant. Their descendants shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people. All who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the posterity whom the LORD has blessed." I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its bud, as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.

This is what is going to take place in Israel.

The land will be healed, and those that have the Spirit will be given a right mind, they will understand at last. And these and so very many more prophecies are throughout the Bible to give us vision as to what is on the horizon. These will be the events which will shortly come to pass after the return of Jesus Christ after the great tribulation. These are events that we will have a part in.

This understanding has been given to us for physical Israel and much more is what God is going to do for His people, and the whole world.

But for us, our vision should be from a different perspective because at that time we will not be physical. Turn to Revelation 20:

I would imagine that a lot of us would be thrilled!

Revelation 20:4-6 And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

Blessed and holy is he that has part in this—blessed; joyous blessings; truly joyous; brilliant after the change; thrilling; happy. The change is going to be marvelous, brethren, for those in the first resurrection, and what an experience to be together for 1,000 years working and teaching with Jesus Christ. And, you will be holy, though you do not feel very holy now.

We will have persevered in the instruction of God, and we will have attained holy, righteous character—the mind of Jesus Christ. It will truly be wonderful.

When will this happen?

I Corinthians 15:19-23 tells us Christ the Firstfruits will come, and then those who are His at His calling; and we will be changed. Turn to Philippians; this has been used three times this Feast, but I really like it.

Philippians 3:20-21 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Philippians 4:1 Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.

This is on the horizon for us if we are faithful.

Romans 8:28-29 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Barnes' Notes: All afflictions, trials, persecutions, and calamities are given to us for our good, though they are numerous and long continued, yet they are among the means that are appointed for our welfare. They shall work together for good, they shall cooperate, they shall mutually contribute to our real good that we might be humbled, and seek God to the end that we might become just like Him.

Daniel 7:13-14 "I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed."

Daniel 7:20-22 "and the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn which came up, before which three fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth which spoke pompous words, whose appearance was greater than his fellows. I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom."

Daniel 7:27 "Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him."

This is the future that we have in store, brethren. This is the future.

Turn to Revelation 22. We have to consider this as well:

Revelation 22:12 "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work."

There is instruction here for us. He will give a reward as his work shall be. It is good to consider the words endure and patience, because it relates directly to our reward. When we picture enduring a trial, we sometimes just picture hanging on, barely hanging on by our fingernails, and, "Oh, it is too tough." But, God's endurance refers to the quality of character that does not allow us to surrender God's standards and values because of trials and circumstances. It pictures not succumbing while under trial. It pictures one, as Paul commented, who continually strives towards the fulfilling the purpose that God has called him for. And in one definition, it does not show just enduring, it shows progress of going forward, despite what the trial is. It also pictures one who realizes the purpose of building godly character. To be able to rightly and lovingly rule and teach and care for those God gives us. That is part of enduring.

We will not turn to Ephesians 4, but it says...perfecting the saints, and that is what our job is going to be until they come to the fullness of Jesus Christ. That is why we have to strive.

As further incentive and enduring, we should all remember that salvation is truly a gift from God, but position, office, jobs, rewards, will be given on the basis of our efforts. Why? Because the zeal and effort put forth at this time will give us the skills to serve God's people at that time. That is why we should work as hard as we can now to stand fast and to make it.

Revelation 2 and 3: He that overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death; and will eat of the hidden manna; he will receive a white stone; he will receive a new name; he that overcomes and keeps God's word will receive power over the nations; he shall rule the earth with a rod of iron; he will be clothed in white; I will make him a pillar in My temple; He will not go out

anymore. To him who overcomes will I grant to sit with Me on My throne; (and here it comes, Jesus Christ speaking), even as I overcame and sat down with My Father in His throne.

Jesus Christ had to overcome just as we do. That is what it is all about. This is part of persevering.

Now we all know about the talents because the time is going to come, based on our talents, we will be given cities; some five, maybe some one, maybe some ten, maybe some of you fifteen. If we are faithful in small things, like Richard brought out, we will be given the big things.

When will these cities be given?

I do not think we have a two-year course in city management before get them. I think we are going to be given these cities right away. I think the reason will be that we are going to grow with the cities, with the people who come out of the Tribulation. We are going to have that kind of knowledge of God. God is going to help us, but we are going to help take care of these people immediately. It is not going to be somebody else. It is going to be you. Hopefully it is going to be me too.

Now a friend used to say, "There is good news, and then there is bad news, and then there is really good news!" The good news is that Jesus Christ is going to return; the bad news is that the world would come to the brink of destruction; and the really good news is that He would come at last and set up His government—the most wonderful blessing to the people of the earth.

You are going to have a part in that, brethren.

Part of it is found in Micah 4 (which we will not turn to for time), but people will come to the capitol in Zion; every man will sit under his vine and fig tree; none will make him afraid. To me that is a marvelous thought about the Kingdom of God.

Yes, we are all afraid of something—when I was a boy of about 11, the polio scare was big. I touched somebody who came down with polio, and I was afraid I would get polio. I was afraid for months. We could not go swimming because of polio. We thought that is where it came from.

[Because of fear,] how many mammograms are taken? How many prostate exams are taken? How many colonoscopies are taken to see if we have cancer? How many people put bars on their homes? How many people sit in fear of the government, or in fear of hoodlums killing people in the open? No more! It will be gone.

Everybody will sit under their vine in peace, without being afraid. It will be a wonderful time. That is what we have to look forward to.

There will be no more homeless; the people will have land.

Hebrews 8 brings out that God will put His law into the hearts of the people. And for the first time God's people are going to approach God within a different relationship. God will have sons and daughters that truly love Him, and their actions will be internalized. Not from an external stimulus. They will not just be keeping the law, but they will be able to understand it, and move with it, making decisions by it. And they will love their neighbor by it. And it is going to be absolutely wonderful. What a society that is going to be! And Jesus Christ will be their Elder Brother. And what a wonderful brother He will be; truly marvelous.

And we will have a part in the giving of the land. Somebody mentioned that in Amos 5:13-15 that hills and mountains will flow with wine; the earth will produce so wonderfully. And in the book of Haggai, is it going to be a time of wealth.

Haggai 2:6-8 "For thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the LORD of hosts. 'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the LORD of hosts. 'The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the

former,' says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the LORD of hosts."

How encouraging!

Then will come the problem of too many children in Jerusalem! They will start to branch out. They will complain "not enough room." You can read about that in Isaiah 49. And, in Isaiah 41, Israel will start threshing the mountains, and the wilderness, and the earth will be prepared for something that is going to come.

Turn to Revelation 20. This is what this day pictures:

Revelation 20:11-13 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.

As Mr. Slusher said, we are going to be judging these people found in I Corinthians 6.

Turn back to Ezekiel. I am going to go through this because it is truly encouraging.

Ezekiel 37:1-14 The hand of the LORD came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and indeed they were very dry. And He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" So I answered, "O Lord GOD, You know." Again He said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: "Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and

you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the LORD."'''

So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone. Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them. Also He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live."'''

So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army. Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!' Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it," says the LORD.'"

We know that Isaiah 65 talks about a time period of 100 years. These people will have a chance to live and to grow and understand God's way for the first time. And you are going to have a tremendous part in that.

I do not think that any of us would want to miss that at all. It will be exciting.

I had a mother and father, and I have my grandmother to whom I gave a very hard time when I was young. I was trying to be a young man, and she wanted me to be a little boy, we fought and argued. It will be so neat to see her again. She had a very young grandson who died when he was about an hour old. I am looking forward to seeing Gregory and working with him. And I am sure all of you out there are looking forward to seeing your children, your

parents, your aunts and uncles, and all the ancestors that go all the way back. It is going to be wonderful.

That is what this day pictures, brethren.

This is why this season is so hopeful, because it gives us so much to go home with, to recharge your batteries so they last for the coming year. Or at least until the Passover season. Turn to Revelation 21. This passage is still part of the vision God wants us to have, part of the promises of God.

Revelation 21:1-5 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write [remember these words], for these words are true and faithful."

Now brethren, God has given us hope, and a bright future for all mankind in faith in believing His promises, and outlined what is in store for us. The world does not understand any of this. They do not have a clue as to what is taking place. They do not know who God is; who they are; what the meaning is of the disaster that has come upon them, and they do not have a glimmer of the wonderful future we heard about. Exciting, uplifting, just marvelous what has been set before us.

Because we are the friends of God, He has revealed it to us—our hope, faith, and vision that it might be sure; that we might not wander around in the dark and fall for strange doctrines. Because of this, He expects us with this hope and faith to produce the will to stand and persevere. He expects us to produce something, not just to be a tune to listen to, but to produce something that will make us stand for something; put something in us.

Brethren, what is going to give us the most trouble this coming year? You might want to drink too much? You are going to quit smoking? Or stop my lust for this or that? And those things will certainly be there.

But our overall enemy is the same as in the prison camps—the environment we live in. The world for the most part is against anything that is wholesome, honest, and right. This is one reason why we stand out as a bright light in the environment. The environment also wears at us; he wants to pull us down.

This is Satan's world, and we see things continually degenerating, as it says in Matthew 24:12, "Because lawlessness will abound, the love of many shall grow cold." If we do not hang on to the vision, and the hope, and the faith that we have, our love will wax cold in what we need to do.

We are continually faced with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, in entertainment and business, and every aspect of life. We have to resist that.

As I have mentioned, hope, faith, and vision in the prison camp produced the prisoners who survived with the will to take steps and action that they might resist the loneliness and the brainwashing, helps us being captive. It is interesting to see some of the things they did.

The first thing they did was they communicated. They talked with each other whenever they could. They encouraged, they picked up, they just encouraged each other, they called often. The enemy knew that if they could stop communication with others of like mind, that their will to survive would be broken down. That should give you a clue of how important it is. Turn to Malachi 3.

Malachi 3:16-18 Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name. "They shall be Mine," says the LORD of hosts, "on the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare

them as a man spares his own son who serves him." Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.

Hebrews 10:22-25 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

It is important that we attend services each week. I know one lady that is all by herself and has nobody around her. She has asked for a list of the widows in the church. She has no encouragement, but she writes to all the widows, and she gets letters back, and that is encouraging. She keeps in contact. The day may come when we cannot. But we can now. Do not forget to do that.

The prisoners in the camps: they would take aggressive action to counteract the enemy's control over them. Whenever in this big general camp, they would play football every afternoon without a football. They would line up, they would have two teams, they would have people up in the bleachers, and North Koreans could not understand what they were doing. And they would yell, "Get out of my way!" and catch the football.

Also, the Korean guards would turn the lights on in the barracks at 4:30 a.m. but would already find everybody sitting up, pretending to read a book they did not have, or repairing garments they did not have in their hands to repair.

They did this to fight against the enemy's control over them. They were trying to confuse their minds. They could not fight back physically. But they did things like the British did—having tea—without tea and cups. This was all to rattle the enemy's mind, and to keep their own sanity. Some recited prayer daily; some kept a calendar scratched on the wall; some had pet spiders, insects, or small animals like rats. They had to focus their mind to keep control of their mind. They did everything to keep control of their minds, and not to give in to the enemy.

And as for us, we are required to do all we can to keep our minds controlled and fixed in the right direction. The top of the list for a sound mind is prayer.

Now, you have heard this since day one in the church—prayer, Bible study, fasting, and meditation. To survive we must maintain close contact with God every day. As the apostle Paul said in Philippians, he was single-minded. Contact and closeness with God always came first. Not business or anything else. Contact with God came first.

And without daily study, we are going to drift away. That is the truth. And we all know that Satan will do his best to pick off stragglers. Turn to Romans 1.

We know that in Romans 10, faith comes by the hearing of the Word, and we know that Psalm 19:7-8 says that the law is perfect, converting the soul. So, we are now back in the body of beliefs again:

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

This is why you have to study to know the gospel of God. Therefore, our action in enduring and hanging on, persevering, is one to encourage each other, to pray fervently, and study diligently, to be obedient to God. This is no small thing. And we do this to protect the hope and faith, and the vision we have been given. If we do not, we let down, and fail.

In this last year, you have allowed wrong things to creep into your minds, and frequent your mind, if you have allowed yourself the wrong environments, or allowed wrong environments to come into your home, television, cable, or whatever, if you find yourself slipping in certain areas, this is the time to reaffirm in your minds that you have to get your act together; me too; all of us. This is fish or cut bait time. You had better be serious about what you believe.

None of us know what this coming year is going to bring. We all know that the world's problems are growing worse daily, and as Mr. Herbert W.

Armstrong said in the past, the world is heading for a crash-bang finale. But in all that will happen, we have the assurance of God that He will never leave or forsake us.

II Chronicles 16:9 “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.”

God says that when you are striving to grow and overcome, His eyes search the earth to see how He can help you. Another translation of this would be, "Whose heart is loyal, or is at peace and harmony with Him." God searches to see whose heart is at peace with Him.

Richard taught me Hebrews 13:5, "Let your conduct be without covetousness; and be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave or forsake you.'" In the Greek it means, "I will never, never, never, never, never ever leave you or forsake you." It is a promise of God. He will never leave or forsake you. So with all that is coming, do not you dare give up. Do not you dare quit.

We have been called at one of the most exciting times in history. We have been called to see the conclusion of this age; the culmination of the sins of man. One major reason is we are going to see what man under man's rule has produced. And when you are a spirit being, and you are teaching in the Kingdom of God, you are going to know firsthand what going the way of mankind has caused.

Turn to Revelation 3, verses 7 through 11. This is the group that God refers to as the Philadelphian church. These are the ones he is chosen to be Philadelphians.

Revelation 3:7-11 "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens: "I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and

are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.”

Do not let down. Do not be sidetracked.

For our final scripture, turn to Hebrews 12. This has always been touching to me because I think of all the heroes in Hebrews 11. And I know this is not scriptural, I picture all of the people who had gone before us, simply looking down at us, and saying, "Go on! You can make it!"

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance [perseverance] the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author [the Beginner] and finisher [our Conclusion] of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus Christ endured all He did to increase His Family.

So, as we leave the Feast of Tabernacles and this Last Great Day, let us do so with our minds set not to let down. Be committed to hold fast, no matter what, and follow the examples of the apostle Paul, reaching forward to the high calling of Jesus Christ.