

Don't Be Indifferent

End Time Attitudes

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We are going to begin the sermon this afternoon in Daniel 12:4. It is a familiar Scripture to us.

There are times when I look back on life—at least how *I* understand it—how it was lived one hundred or two hundred years ago. I did this with a measure of envy for those who lived then. Life was busy to them to be sure, because many of the everyday chores we now have performed by time and energy-saving machinery they did by hand.

When they had to go to the store, it was a time-consuming horse-and-buggy affair, especially so if they lived outside of town. Almost every meal had to be prepared from scratch, and hearing of news events going on in the community, in the county, in the state, or the nation was rare. There was no radio or television to turn on. There may not even have been a newspaper. In fact, there was no electricity. There were no beauty salons. You just could not pass off to a movie house for diversion. Social life centered on church affairs, and those social affairs rarely took place. If you wanted to visit your next door neighbor, he probably lived at least a mile or two away from you.

I personally believe that the labor-saving benefits of modern technology have been greatly over-valued, primarily because they have not really made us better people, nor have they really saved us anything but time-consuming labor. I do not believe that we have filled up the time with much that is of any real value in terms of character or of practical improvement of the mind. Most have filled their minds with vain entertainment that tends to separate them from something much more valuable: their fellow family members.

We are spending very much time running about to and fro in the automobile, apart from one another, listening to inane music, or trying to keep in touch with what is going on in the world through news broadcasts coming from a media source so heavily liberally slanted it absolutely cannot be trusted for accuracy.

In Daniel 12:4 He is talking about the end time.

Daniel 12:4 "But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase."

I probably worry far more than I should about this very busy way of life we pursue here in the United States as a way of making us indifferent to pursuing things of far, far greater value. I feel this because I see confirmation in God's word that He consistently shows, not only to us, that as a crisis approaches—something that is a reckoning in His word over a long period of time—that inexplicably people are indifferent to the most important thing.

The thought struck me recently that there is more written about the Feast of Trumpets than any other Holy Day. Indeed, there may be more written about Trumpets than all other Holy Days combined, even though it is only mentioned in the Bible (as Richard said this morning ["Do You Recognize This Man? (Part 5)"]) three or four times. It is alluded to in many, many places because, as we have been told, about one-third of the Bible is prophecy, and of that one-third—(I am just guessing,

speculating)—about 90% in some way directly or indirectly involves the time of the end, and that is what Trumpets is about for us today.

Let us go to Leviticus 23:24 regarding Trumpets.

Leviticus 23:24-25 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a Sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it; and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD.'"

Trumpets is not only about end-time events, it is a memorial. And again, this morning Richard speculated as to what those memorials might be. He speculated that it had something to do with the blowing of a lot of trumpets.

Memorials do look back on an event that has already occurred so that we remember that event as important to our history and also what we are today. I will give an example: The Fourth of July—Independence Day. We look back on what occurred on that day and how *meaningful* what occurred there 230 some years ago is to us today, and so it is memorialized as a day set apart for recognition of those events.

Now that has occurred with Trumpets as well. It is a memorial. I can add something to what Richard said. This again is a speculation. There are implications in Psalm 81 regarding Joseph's redemption from prison to him being second in command in Egypt; that it took place in one day, and that *that* day was on the Feast of Trumpets. We do not know this absolutely for sure, but it seems indicative, it seems to imply that, because we can make Joseph a type of Jesus Christ, and in one day Joseph became second in command. That is what is going to happen with Jesus Christ. He will be second in command, but He will be ruling over the nations.

The sum of these things is that in those areas we are looking backwards, but Trumpets is also a day that looks forward. What I want us to see here in this verse is that it says: "...the blowing of Trumpets, a holy convocation." In the Hebrew, that word "holy convocation" is *shemini atzereth*, and it means a holy convocation. It means a sacred assembly. It is different from a normal day by the fact that it has been made to be one of these. Trumpets is unique in a way that other Holy Days cannot claim.

David Grabbe mentioned that it is right in the middle of the Holy Days ["Clouds"]. It is the fourth of the seven holy days—three before, and three follow it; thus it gives the impression that the other three in front and the other three behind actually *revolve* around Trumpets. It is the key to look back in time. It is the key to look forward in time, because it occupies that critical position right in the middle. What happens on Trumpets is going to prove to be the axle upon which history turns.

I gave a sermon a number of years ago that I titled "The Sixth Century Axial Period." An axle is a shaft on which something turns. It may turn a wheel, or a pulley, or a year. An axial period is a slice of time, a section of time during which pivotal historical events occur which turn world history into a configuration it never had before. It is a period of very significant wars, social upheaval, upsets in the weather, a rise in religion, and these things bring about social and cultural changes—very great ones. The one I used as my model spanned parts of the 5th and the 6th centuries BC. In that period of time, Israel, Assyria, Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Silicia either disappeared or became minor nations, and in their place came the nations of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. In Babylon's case it was

the first of the great nations to arise out of that period, and the other three were beginning their march toward their universal greatness.

Turn with me to Daniel 2:31-35. By the time we get to the verses we are going to read here, the 6th axial period was well underway. The first group of nations I mentioned is gone. They are just historical markers, and they no longer play a significant role in the world. Babylon had risen out of the Tigris-Euphrates valley plain there, and Nebuchadnezzar was now the king. So we are in that period between about 586 BC, and the period a number of years after that. Let us read Daniel 2:31-35.

Daniel 2:31-35 "You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

Daniel 2:44-45 And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure."

Babylon had already risen from the chaos of that axial period. Nebuchadnezzar was a great king. We would have to say a world-ruling king. He had this dream God gave to him, and he could not remember what the dream was about, and it really disturbed him. Eventually God sent Daniel to him, to help him recall the dream, and also the interpretation. The interpretation we all know.

Babylon was going to go through a period of time as number one in the world, but it would be replaced by Medo-Persia. And then Medo-Persia would go on for awhile, only to be replaced by Greece. It would go on for a while, only to be replaced by Rome. And then the vision carries that image all the way to the time of the end, and then we find a *massive* period of time, and out of that massive period of time the Gentile nations will be destroyed and be replaced by the Kingdom of God. That, brethren, will be the last axial period in the history of this earth.

So there we have a brief overview. We can look forward to that axial period, and by every indication we are able to see, and maybe things we *do* not see, everything looks like we are in the beginning edges, at the very least, of this axial period that is taking place. We see the rise and fall of nations. We see upsets in the weather. We see all of the things that preceded in the other axial periods that occurred, and so we are given signs that we interpret. I think we are doing it correctly.

Most of the prophesying during that axial period that pertains to the axial period is recorded in the book of Jeremiah. There is some of it in Isaiah. There is some of it in Ezekiel. There is some of it, as we just read here, in Daniel. Each of the minor prophets also has some of it as well. All these pieces put together in all of these prophesies add to the picture we are able to see.

The same thing is occurring now in *this* axial period that we are into, and it is recorded by Jesus. It is recorded by the Apostle John. A good bit of it is recorded in Jeremiah, and again in Ezekiel. Less of it is recorded in the book of Isaiah, but there is still much in the minor prophets that pertain to this time as well. So we can see it, that it is occurring, and we know that the nations of this world are being shaken up as never before.

One of the more interesting things about these prophecies we find in these books is that God not only predicts what is going to happen in terms of the nations of the earth, but He also even tells us what the people's attitudes are going to be like based upon what they were when the prophecies were made. This is very important to you and me. In fact, there is a great deal of information regarding one's attitude toward the awesome event, and the remainder of this sermon is going to be focused there.

A person's perspective of an event is exceedingly important. Many misjudgments have been made by not having the proper perspective, by just looking at it in the wrong way. The process is turning, and we are going to look at ones that took place at the very beginning of the axial period, and it is a very good indicator.

We are going to look in the book of Amos. Amos wrote this book, and he prophesied against the Ten Northern Tribes from which the modern nations of Israel have come.

Turn now to Amos 5, verses 18-20. Notice the attitude that these Israelites had. They had not yet really been brought down, but they were on their way.

Amos 5:18-20 Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! For what good is the day of the LORD to you? It will be darkness, and not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him! Or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him! Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?

Are you beginning to see a picture form here? These people—Israelites—were not without knowledge of the ramifications of the Day of the Lord. Undoubtedly they heard sermons given to them that the Day of the Lord was coming, that God was angry with Israel, but what was their attitude toward this? They were not really concerned, and so God's warning to these Israelites is that they had the wrong attitude regarding those warnings because their perception of themselves and the day's significance was entirely wrong. To them the Day of the Lord was entirely going to be a day of vindication, a day of awesome victory to Israel and the establishment of it, and of course therefore to them as the greatest of all nations, because others would be judged and found wanting.

Their perception was entirely in error through ignorance of their own character flaws and their culture's great sin. They did not think that what was going to happen on the Day of the Lord was going to be a day of judgment to Amos' warning them, that their works were not going to stand before the penetrating judgment of God.

Let us go to Amos 4, verse 6 to prove that they had been warned in many ways.

Amos 4:6-7 "Also I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities. and lack of bread in all your places; [The people had already gone through famine, so here is God testifying to them, "I did that."] Yet you have not returned to Me," says the LORD. "I also withheld

rain from you, when there were still three months to the harvest. I made it rain on one city, I withheld rain from another city. One part was rained upon, and where it did not rain the part withered.

Do you see what God did? He sent problems here, there, kind of hop-scotched around, but did anybody in the country say, "What does this mean?" "Is there anything that I should get out of this?"

If you are familiar with the book of Amos, you will know that in the first two chapters God circled every one of the nations around Israel and told them what their problems were before He got to Israel. By the time He was done with chapter one and most of chapter two, the Israelites were probably applauding Amos. "Yeah! Give it to them! Give it to them!" And then he started to hit them with *their* problems. He had their full attention whenever he was preaching against the other nations, and now he has advanced to the place where he is telling the Israelites that God said, "I sent the famine." "I sent the drought on you."

You should have noticed by this time that the great disasters of quite significant magnitude so far have not fallen on Israel. Maybe part of Israel is beginning to be prepared for one though.

Amos 4:8-12 So two or three cities wandered to another city to drink water, but they were not satisfied; Yet you have not returned to Me," says the LORD. "I blasted you with blight and mildew. When your gardens increased, your vineyards, your fig trees, and your olive trees, the locust devoured them; Yet you have not returned to Me," says the LORD. "I sent among you a plague after the manner of Egypt; Your young men I killed with a sword, along with your captive horses; I made the stench of your camps come up into your nostrils; Yet you have not returned to Me," says the LORD. "I overthrew some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were like a firebrand plucked from the burning; Yet you have not returned to Me," says the LORD. [We are fighting wars all over the place, and our young men are being killed, sometimes very horribly, being blow up all over the place. Is the United States going through a repentance?] "Therefore thus will I do to you, O Israel; Because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!"

The next chapter is the one we were into before. The people who were listening to Amos preach this sermon already had the warning, and they were not taking this thing seriously. They were indifferent to the word of God given through His prophet. Instead, they wanted to do everything they could to shoot the messenger. They tried to kill him a little bit later, but God intervened.

My concern is that maybe we could be somewhat like the Israelites here in the book of Amos. Incidentally, the researchers believe this book took place probably somewhere around 760 BC. Israel fell in 721-718. In other words, this is roughly 40 years before Israel fell. God gave them that long to repent, and they did not. They never changed their attitude. They were above it. They had other concerns. Other things occupied their thoughts and distracted them away from the seriousness of the attitude problems that they had.

We need to understand that we are not above this sort of approach. This is one reason why you will never hear me preach, "If you are with us, you are a sure bet to go to the place of safety." Each one of us has to prove his faithfulness to God, and that is why we must govern ourselves. There is no such thing as blanket salvation.

We are going to look at a series of Scriptures beginning in II Peter 3:1-5. Then to Isaiah, and then to Ezekiel. There will be almost no comment on these. I want you to see that God recorded the attitude of people through long periods of time so we will see that, sure enough, all through history there have been large numbers of people who have been flippant in their attitude toward God, and did not really take seriously the warnings that were given.

II Peter 3:1-5 Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior [he is referring to the prophecies of the Old Testament and also the things that were spoken to them by the apostles under the New Covenant], knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water...

We do not need to go any further here. You see the drift of what Peter is saying.

Let us go now to Isaiah 5. We move from that time even before the Flood. In Isaiah 5 we are in that period of time, as I said, sometime around 720-730 BC, and this time Isaiah is preaching to the Jews. They fell a little over a hundred years later, but already God was making His warning.

Isaiah 5:18 Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of vanity [emptiness, falsehood], and sin as if with a cart rope;

He is talking about people who never repent, who never change, and so their sins pile up, as it were, behind them, and they are staked up in a cart being pulled by a horse, but only it is not being pulled by a horse, it is being pulled by a person. He is attached to the cart, and everywhere he goes his sins are right there with him, driving him down.

Isaiah 5:18-19 Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as if with a cart rope; That say, "Let Him make speed and hasten His work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come, that we may know it."

Such proud scoffers! Here these people are, carrying all their sins around them with a burden, and yet they are telling God, "Well, bring it on! Bring it on! That's all right." Do you see the attitude of indifference?

Let us go to Jeremiah. Jeremiah is speaking here sometime right around 600 BC, just before Judah fell. Let us look at Jeremiah 17:15. This chapter is best known for "the heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." God is the speaker here.

Jeremiah 17:15 Indeed they say to me, "Where is the word of the LORD? Let it come now!"

Again, proud men... "I can take it. Send it on!" ...as if God were nothing.

Now we are going to turn to Ezekiel. Ezekiel comes *after* Jeremiah. In fact, Ezekiel was already in captivity *with* the Jews.

Ezekiel 12:22 "Son of man, what is this proverb that you people have about the land of Israel, which says, 'The days are prolonged, and every vision fails'?"

Do you know what He is referring to there? The prophets God sent were not heeded. The people remembered what the prophets said. It did not happen the day after tomorrow, or the next week, or the next month, and so they thought that God was either too weak, or He really does not care. "Yeah! Send it on. They are all failing."

Ezekiel 12:26-28 Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, look, the house of Israel is saying, 'The vision that he sees is for many days from now, and he prophesies of times far off.' Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "None of My words will be postponed any more, but the word which I speak will be done," says the Lord GOD."

The sum of that is this: In every age, there are people who are going to mock God, throwing challenges at Him out of their very super-confident self-righteousness. "So let what the prophets threatened come," they say. "We do not believe what they say. If it does, it's not going to be all that bad."

In the book of Amos you can be sure that they very much knew that the times they were living in were not all that good. They had witness to famine, to drought, to warfare, and so forth. There was violence everywhere in the land, and a very great disproportion of wealth, as the book of Amos shows.

They very much coveted the fulfillments of the good times on the other side of the prophecy, and Amos meets that hypocrisy by warning them that they had nothing in common with God, and that the Day of the Lord was going to be for them a time of continuous fear and death. That is why God said to the scoffers, "Prepare to meet your God." Through Peter, He warns most of us in the end time that just as surely as He brought the Flood and destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, and sent Israel into captivity, the judgment of that "great day" we are facing now is coming, and we had better not be indifferent and bet our eternal life that it is at a time far off.

Let us turn to Luke 21 to a very familiar set of Scriptures just to make face with it and take its advice.

Luke 21:22 For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.

Luke 21 is the parallel of Matthew 24. Drop down to verse 34 of Luke 21. Jesus is speaking.

Luke 21:34-35 "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.

Do you see what He said there? Pay attention to what Jesus said. "For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth." We all dwell on the earth. It can be a trap.

Luke 21:36 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."

I read this least we become careless. I want us to take warning that we may be putting the wrong emphasis on verse 36 and the word "watch." After all these trainings, you might say, the repetitious mentions of it we had in the Worldwide Church of God about it, meaning to watch world news...that is not the primary purpose of this word "watch." That word means "be alert."

Being alert means being aware of what is going on around us. We are to be alert in the way a sentry on duty is to be alert, and being a sentry on duty not only means keeping your eyes and ears peeled, you might say, tuned in to what is going around, it also means that the sentry has to be capable of making a right judgment regarding what he is alert to. This is where the problem arises. In many cases we are *not* making the right judgments because our perspective of what is going on is off kilter.

While watching world news is included within the framework of understanding of the main message of this chapter, the primary focus of that word is to be alert not only to what is happening in the world in terms of prophecy, but by what is happening in our own life, and in our attitude in relation to the time when these prophecies are being fulfilled.

Do you see what I am differentiating here in relation to the message I am giving to you? We not only have to be alert, we have to be prepared to make a right judgment. The people in Israel that Amos was reporting to were alert in terms of what was happening, but they made the wrong judgment because they believed that they were going to escape what was happening.

We cannot afford to take that attitude like some of these groups who are telling people, "If you are with us, you are going to miss all of this because you are going to be whisked away and be taken to a place of safety." We cannot afford to allow that to creep into our mind, because it is going to modify our attitude significantly.

We have to be prepared to meet our God to the best of our ability as we can all the time. That requires a great deal of attention and thinking about what we are doing. But I will tell you this, it is going to please God if we do, because He will be the focus of our thinking, and His purpose will be the focus of our thinking, and what He wants us to do is going to be the focus of our thinking. What are we going to be doing? We are going to be doing all we can to be prepared, just in case. We have no promise even of living until tomorrow. That may sound kind of dark, but God has blessed us with life, has He not, every day so far? He has, and He will provide, but we still have to do all within our power as best we can to please Him, and that is what pleases Him.

There is an additional reason why I say this at this time, and that is because, as we are approaching the end, in the words of our own Savior, Jesus Christ. He says that just before His return, a significant part of the Church is going to go to sleep. We are warned. They are going to be awake, but they are going to be asleep. They are not ramping up their attention to those things which are most important in our life. And really brethren, when we look at Luke 14, which we did this morning, about the standards Jesus Christ sets for those who are His disciples, we have to love Him more than anything else.

He is not asking us to do anything that is beyond what He has already told us whenever we were baptized and entered the covenant. He has to come first, and so we have to adjust our thinking to do what we can to meet what He says, and to submit to it with the sacrifice of our lives in order to do all

we can to be alert and to be awake. How good is a sentry who is asleep? That sentry is not going to help himself, let alone anybody else.

Let us go to Matthew 25:1. We will tie the parable in here with the warning.

Matthew 25:1 "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

Everybody knows who the virgins are, and everybody knows who the Bridegroom is.

Matthew 25:5 But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

Do you see that? Everybody in the church goes to sleep to some degree, so none of us is non-susceptible. We all are to some degree, and there have been times when we have allowed ourselves to rather dozily drift off for a period of time, and maybe a sermon or something wakes us back up. We repent, and we get back to doing what we should have been doing in the first place. Human nature has that kind of proclivity, and so He is warning that everybody has the proclivity to go to sleep at the switch.

Matthew 25:6 "And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!'

I would have to say that overall, especially for those of you who are a little bit older in the faith and came out of the Worldwide Church of God, that through his preaching, all of us were awakened to varying degrees of intensity; but we were awakened nonetheless. We heard the cry go out—"Behold, Christ is going to come." We repented. We became part of the group, and so his worth did not go without filling some positive significance pluses for all of us.

I think one of the things that really is a problem for us is what I began this sermon with, and that is, "What are we doing with our time?" Look at it in this regard. Everybody gets up in the morning. We have 24 hours, let us say. Everybody is equally given an amount of time every day. You may say you do not have that problem because you have more than you have to do with your time. That is probably a true statement. There is a lot we have to do, and it is the decisions that we make in regard to what we *do* with that time. What is it, then, that we think about that should come first in the use of our time?

Are you aware that nowhere does God call the Laodiceans lazy? He does not. They may be accomplishing a very great deal. The problem He has with them is He names specifically that "they are blind." They may be working very hard diligently, but they are blind. And then He also says, "They are naked." Both are very significant spiritual images that He is giving there. To be blind does not mean they cannot see. It means rather they do not see what is significantly spiritual that they should be spending their time on.

The Laodiceans may work very diligently, hard, putting in long hours and produce a great deal of material wealth. All of that effort is, to a very great degree, being wasted as far as Jesus is concerned, because they are not giving enough of their time and energy to doing things that are spiritually important to Him. We know that Christ is our boss. He is our Savior. He bought us with a price. He owns us, so He has every right to tell us what He wants us to do with our time, and if we pay attention to that, then He is not going to call us blind.

The second thing is that He calls them "naked." Very likely physically they have plenty of clothes to cover themselves. That is not the issue. What do we have to be clothed with that Christ would find to be important? The book of Colossians makes it very clear. We have to be clothed with righteousness. He confirms this in Revelation 19: "Her white clothing is the righteousness of saints."

Practically the whole chapter in Colossians is spent on this very subject, that we have to take off and put on, take off and put on—take off today's rags that represent the evil of this world, and put on the righteousness that results from doing the commands of God and pleasing Him. There is where the Laodiceans' problem is. It is not that they are without energy; rather, they are spending their energy on the wrong things, and thus they earn the name of being blind and without clothing.

Let us drop down to verse 8 of Matthew 25.

Matthew 25:8-9 And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.'

The lesson here, brethren, is that the quantities of oil are not transferable. Righteousness cannot be passed from one person to another. Faith cannot be passed. Nothing spiritual can be passed from one person to another. Each person has to accrue his own oil.

Matthew 25:10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

That is really threatening, because what He is saying is the time is going to run out. Time is not limitless. We are physical. We can die. Each person has to buy his own oil through his obedience, and the use of the spirit and relationship with God. Each person also has to make sure that he uses his time effectively. And then in verse 13:

Matthew 25:13 "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

Did you ever notice that in a movie or in a novel when intruders are trying to break into some facility, that they almost invariably are shown taking advantage of a guard or a watchman whose attention is less than it should be because he is distracted by doing something else or only sleepily performing his duty?

Do you know why the con men succeed? It is because those who are conned by the scam are so intent, so absorbed in making a killing that they are distracted. They are not watchful of the character of the person coming to them, usually with a very obvious deception or scam, and so the person is caught off guard.

That is the lesson of this parable, and others besides. Satan is the master con artist, and that is why God has so many warnings to His children regarding our attitude at this time. Satan has created a world with a multitude of attractive diversions, red herrings, cares designed to attract our attention and scam us into wasting oodles of time on exciting vanities.

Now taken within the context of these two parables—Luke 21 and Matthew 25—one gets a very clear picture that when we get down to the end-time, to live without alertness to our own standing

before God is to invite disaster. That is why I am giving this sermon, so that we can see in God's word that He warns us, that as the crisis approaches, for some reason people do not pay attention and do not take it seriously.

Beginning with Israel in 760 BC or so, right on down through and up to the time that Jesus preached—and of course we understand that human nature has not changed—we are subject to these same kinds of proclivities as well. It is up to us to govern ourselves. Christ has left that responsibility in our hand. We have to choose.

Now if we are in the right attitude, then it is very likely we are going to make the right choices. But if we are distracted and diverted, it is very easy to get into the wrong attitude like the Israelites were in Amos' day, completely misjudging the preaching they were hearing, and feeling that somehow *they* were above making what was really the right decision.

The main tool of the con artist is deceit and surprise; therefore, if you know this and have things of value that you want to protect, you are going to prod yourself to stay alert and be prepared so that you are neither surprised nor deceived.

I can reduce this whole thing down to a simple sentence or two. We can learn from these parables—Luke 21 and Matthew 25—that rejection from the Kingdom of God is based on failure in duty—just simple failure to carry out the instructions that are given to us. The instructions are not complex. We are taught what they are. It could be in our attitude. It could be in what is going on around us, and us making a wrong decision based on our own personal need.

As we heard this morning, Jesus Christ is coming to *reward* His brothers and sisters. That should be our attitude. It should spur us to work to submit to God. And on what is our reward based? Steadfast faithfulness...just like Abel. He was rewarded because he did what God said. It is not complex. Abel's attitude was fixed on pleasing God, and that he did, and he was rewarded. So we have to prod ourselves awake and submit as we are told to do.

Let us go to I Thessalonians 5:1-9. This is interesting because this follows after chapter 4, which has the information about Christ's return.

I Thessalonians 5:1-2 But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.

Take the lesson here. Paul has just finished talking about Christ's return, and so he turns from that and instructs the people this way in regard to Christ's return. So really, brethren, if we fit into this, we know better. That is what he is saying in these first two verses. "For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night."

I Thessalonians 5:3 For when they [the people out in the world] say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

They had been warned, just like in Amos, just like in Sodom and Gomorrah, just like in Noah's day, but they do not take the warning, and they shall not escape. God is consistent. He is faithful. He changes not. He follows the same patterns so that we know that He is the faithful God, and as He did in the past He is going to do today. He is following through with His warnings now before it happens.

I Thessalonians 5:4-9 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night [They are in spiritual darkness.], and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Verse 8 ought to remind us of something. It ought to remind us of Ephesians 6, where Satan is directly called our enemy, and then Paul goes right on and says virtually these same things. "Put on all this armor so that you are ready to fight." What is he telling these people here, to you and to me? He just got done telling them about the return of Jesus Christ, and then he tells them he really does not need to give them a lot of instruction. But verse 8 tells us it is going to be a period of time when we are going to need all the armor of God in order to fight the battles that are going to take place during that period of time leading up to Christ's return. The pressure is going to be on us to maintain our spirituality.

It is interesting to note that from the way it was reported in II Peter, that even though God sent the warning of the Flood and of Sodom and Gomorrah, the people were taken by surprise. When Jesus spoke during His ministry, He spoke as though He expected that the Jews should have known who He was because they had the prophecies and because of what He was doing was showing them He was fulfilling the prophecies, that He was the Messiah. They could have even calculated it out from the prophecies that it was time for Him to show up; not to the day or hour, but they knew. The Bible even shows there were people who knew that it was about time for the Messiah to appear. He even told them, "Hey, you can forecast the weather, but you do not know the times you live in." He was referring to Himself. They should have known.

Now if you get the parallel, you are thinking in the right direction. We are in the same circumstance. **We should know.** We do not know the day or the hour, but we know that we are getting awfully close. It still may be years away, and indeed it is years away, but we are close enough that we are in the ballpark in terms of time.

Let us go to Ezekiel 33:30-33. In Ezekiel 33 is something I believe that could very well apply to you and to me. Do you know that the people later on killed Ezekiel? They put him to death. Now think of that. This man was sent by God to mercifully warn these people. They put him to death.

Ezekiel 33:30-33 "As for you, son of man, the children of your people are talking about you beside the walls and in the doors of the houses; and they speak to one another, everyone saying to his brother, 'Please come and hear what the word is that comes from the LORD.' [Notice the acknowledgment that Ezekiel really was a prophet. They knew it!] So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who

has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them. And when this comes to pass—surely it will come—then they will know that a prophet has been among them."

It is too late. Some of them will die. They will come up in the second resurrection, and then they will know. Some of them will go through the pain Ezekiel prophesied of, but it will be too late, and they will experience the pain. Would not it be tragic if some of those into whose ears the trumpets are blown do not take heed? I am thinking of us, going all the way back to Herbert Armstrong. So when Christ finally comes there are two radically different attitudes that will be seen through these horrific events.

In II Timothy we will see the one attitude.

II Timothy 4:8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Now there is one group of people. They really and truly love Jesus Christ. They may have died. They are going to be resurrected, and like the Apostle Paul, even before they died, they *loved* Jesus Christ's appearing. What did they do as a result of that love for Him? They paid attention to their lives and made sure that their attitudes were not in any way indifferent to the times they lived in. They were alert to the conditions that were going on around them, in them, through them, whether in their families, or in the business, or whatever. Regardless of where they were, they loved Christ, and they did whatever was necessary to please Him while they were alive. They loved Him, and they will love His appearing.

This comes down to something Richard covered very well. Each person is tested, and each person has similarities in the course that God sets out before them, but each and every person is going to be judged on his own merit. There is no reason to doubt why the people Paul spoke of in verse 8 did what they did. They loved Christ in their life, and when He comes, they are going to continue that love.

Let us look at another side of this. Let us go to the book of Revelation. Again, I want to remind you that what we are reading here in terms of attitude is open to any of us.

Revelation 1:7 Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.

Christ's return is going to be very visible, as we heard in the sermonette.

Let us go now to Revelation 11:15. This is an event that is not going to be hidden from mankind.

Revelation 11:15 Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"

That sets the time.

Drop down to verse 18. Look at what it says here.

Revelation 11:18 The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged,

We saw in II Timothy that there is going to be a group of people who love Christ's appearing; they loved Him in their life, and they responded to Him in their life. They died, and when they are resurrected they are going to keep on loving Him. But on the other hand, we have those who are angry at His return. These people are clearly contrasted to those who love His appearing.

Now why should there be sorrow and fear at His return? Well, it is on account of Him. His coming will be an occasion of grief because it will bring to them remembrance of sin, and neglect of knowledge that they did not believe strongly enough to submit to. They will have intense feelings of guilt, because if they were innocent there would be nothing to be sorrowful or angry about. They dread the punishment for sin.

Does anybody fear the coming of a benefactor? They do not look at His coming as a benefactor. That is clear. Who dreads the arrival of someone who is going to release them from bondage, or to heal them of a sickness, or to pay a debt? You can see the different approach. As the time nears, which are we going to choose to be?

Let us look in Revelation 18:8-11. This is the second chapter on Babylon the Great.

Revelation 18:8-11 Therefore her plagues will come in one day—death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her. "The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.' "And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore:

You can write in your notes Revelation 16:9, 11, and 21 which say the same thing. Two groups. One loves Christ's return. The other hates it and is in disappointment, discouragement, and fear.

Revelation 16:9 And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.

Revelation 16:11 They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.

Revelation 16:21 And great hail from heaven fell upon men, *each hailstone* about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.

Now why is this thing about attitude important? It is because attitudes have a powerful influence on conduct. We can flip that, because this is also true, and that is that right conduct influences attitude in the right direction. They work together, but often attitude is at the beginning and conduct is the result. So in this sermon I have concentrated on attitude because it is the trigger that tends to produce the right decision and the right result.

God has given us the choice of making choices, and we have every resource available to make right choices. If we are alert, we can move our thinking in the right direction, but often, brethren, it is going to require a sacrifice on our part to make an adjustment and a change in our life. So often, brethren, that is what stops us dead in our track. We do not really want to make the sacrifice. But do you know what? We *would*, if we love Christ.

Turn now to Ephesians 5, and we will end on this scripture—a wonderful promise from God through the apostle Paul.

Ephesians 5:13 But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.

Light is a symbol of truth. Truth exposes so that we are able to see.

Ephesians 5:14 Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep..."

Is there anybody here who is asleep? I hope not. I do not mean literally. I mean spiritually.

Ephesians 5:14 "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead..."

Do you see what he is doing there? If we are asleep, we are as good as dead! Do you want to die? That is what he is implying, and that is why he wrote here what he did here. He does not want any of the brethren to die, because if we stay in that attitude, we are going to die.

Ephesians 5:14 "...Arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light."

What a promise! He is guaranteeing it. If we will shake our way awake and be willing to make the repentance that is necessary, to put ourselves on the right track, though we are asleep, we are beginning to wake up, and God says He will give us truth. And then Paul adds:

Ephesians 5:15-16 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Sleep is used in the Bible most frequently in a negative way, and it is representing death or producing poverty. It could be spiritual poverty, and so Paul urges us to shake ourselves awake, and at the same time gives us this wonderful encouraging promise, that if we will take that step, Christ will give us life. In other words, truth will be given and whatever helps are needed will be given to enable us to live our lives circumspectly, and thus make the best use of the time remaining.

Do you know what circumspectly means? It means to be attentive, alert to anything of worth. It means watchful in all directions. It means guarding events, watchful to danger, of error; careful to be prepared. In other words, alert to what is going on, and we will be enabled to meet Christ's command as we watch.

It is God's desire, His will, to deliver us from this evil world, but we must do our part. So keeping ourselves focused on His desire for us is one of those things, and this is why Paul also urges us to not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Perhaps at this time, above all, in this critical time, that purpose is *God's* purpose, so do not be indifferent.