

THE HIDDEN LIFE OF THE PREPARED ONES

Malachi 3:1-3—Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming, Says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like launderers' soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness.

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. For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that will leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves. You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this, says the Lord of hosts.

Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.

Luke 1:13-17, 59-80—But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Luke 1:59-80—So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child; and they would have called him by the name of his father, Zacharias. His mother answered and said, "No; he shall be called John."

But they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name." So they made signs to his father—what he would have him called.

And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, "His name is John." So they all marveled. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God. Then fear came on all who dwelt around them; and all these sayings were discussed

throughout all the hill country of Judea. And all those who heard them kept them in their hearts, saying, "What kind of child will this be?" And the hand of the Lord was with him.

Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham: To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.

II Peter 3:1-13—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, 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, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Let's have another word of prayer:

Our Father, we are gathered today in Jesus' name. Thank You for the power of the Word of God to have its effect in our lives. We thank You for these saints who have gone before us and have written down these things. Oh., may it be that we find ourselves as those who fear and

esteem the Lord and speak of these things one to another that You might remember us this day and say, "Behold they shall be Mine." We gather, Lord, for many reasons, but most of all we gather first of all with a real heart to know You. We pray in this session that You will open our eyes continuously to this matter of the link to Your coming. Thank You, Holy Spirit, for being upon us and with us these days. Oh Lord, now go even deeper into us and continue to do Your work and quicken our spirit that we may see with eyes of wisdom and revelation our Lord Jesus coming for us even now. We want to commit this time simply into Your hands. In Jesus' name. Amen.

WE HAVE BEEN LINKED TO HEAVEN THROUGH THE REDEEMER

As we look in the Gospel of Luke, John the Baptist is credited and commended by God for being the one who initiated or brought in this change of era from the age of law to the age of grace. We notice this in Luke 16:16: "The Law and the Prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached and everyone is pressing into it." Ever since John the Baptist proclaimed: "The kingdom of God is at hand; therefore repent and prepare yourselves because there is One coming whose sandals I am not worthy to unloose," multitudes have been pressing into the kingdom. We can be so full of thanksgiving that we heard this gospel preached. It is a great gospel. As a matter of fact its very content is the gospel of the greatest linkage of all time. When God came down and linked up sinful man through a Mediator, through a Reconciler, through a Redeemer, through the precious blood of the Lamb, we were saved, we were forever linked to heaven—not in judgment and condemnation—but forever to be with God because of the link, even Jesus Christ our Lord. He is *the* link.

GOD'S PLAN TO LINK MAN TO HIMSELF

When we look behind the scene in Colossians 1 and John, we realize that this whole gospel comes out of love. The Father and the Son, in eternal loving fellowship with one another, one day purposed with a divine and eternal purpose: "Let Us make man in our image and likeness. Let's have him share as sons among sons in a kingdom of glory. Let them take dominion and learn how to be sons in glory." That was God's plan out of His love from the beginning to link man to Himself through Jesus Christ His Son.

Of course, we know the story. Man sinned and fell short of this glorious eternal calling. Because of his sin and the rebellion of the enemy, Satan, things became a mess upon this earth. But God's gospel of love did not have to go to plan B; He went to plan A+. Because His previous plan was to reveal the love of God in the creation, having the care and the fellowship of these sons of glory, now that they have fallen and have been disqualified, plan A+ is: "Let's show them a love that cannot be understood and a greater grace and mercy. We need a Lamb, a Sacrifice, a Redeemer, a Mediator." And the Son said, "I will go."

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S PLAN TO BUILD THE SAVED ONES INTO ONE

This is where John begins to tell us of this great gospel that we know happened in history. These are historic events given to us. Jesus came down and lived. So the incarnation revealed the glory of God. Then He died on the cross; He took us, forgave us, justified us and redeemed us. Then He rose and went to the Father and sent down the Holy Spirit with two fantastic loving

jobs. Have you ever thought about who loves you more—the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit? I think it will be a draw. The Holy Spirit said, “Let Me finish the work. The Son of God said it is finished. Now let Me finish it up. I am going to take each one of these individual souls and justify them, sanctify them, and change them from glory to glory until they are sons in glory so You can enjoy them forever. Wait, let’s do something even more glorious. Let’s take an innumerable multitude of those who are saved from every tribe, nation, kindred, and people, and make them together into one new creation, many made one by the Eternal Spirit. Let Me build into them the unity of the faith as they learn to walk together. When this one entity is ready, We will call her the bride. Then the Son can come and get her. Can I do that?”

This plan, of course, is already quite far along. When we talk about a clash of wills, God has the most stubborn will going. If you have a strong will, well, you are just a strong-willed child. But we are dealing with God who has revealed His will that in the fullness of times He is going to gather together into Christ all things in heaven and earth. He is going to gather us all up into this new glorious creation, and He is set in this purpose.

Therefore, when we read in the book of Revelation that the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ, this is a prophecy that will soon take place. On this earth, there is actually only one more thing that needs to happen for this whole gospel to run its full course and that is for the King to return. We stand in this age when the final link will happen, and our Lord will return and gather all of this up into His kingdom, a kingdom of righteousness for which everybody awaits.

THE SCOFFERS WHO HAVE COME

However, the church today, unfortunately, is not watching and waiting for His soon coming. Peter, the greatest of the evangelists that we know, told us that by the end of his life there were already scoffers who were coming along saying, “Hey, what is this business about the nearness of His coming? People have died; things have gone on. Things are going on like they have always gone on. Where is the promise of His coming?” Scoffers have come. I do not know why the church ever turned its ear to listen to scoffers. We have within this larger church, even among people who preach the gospel, ones who do not preach the second coming of Christ. Some people say that they have a four squared doctrine, four basic foundations of doctrine, and the fourth one is always the soon coming of the Lord Jesus. When you read in the gospels and in the book of Acts the various apostles preaching the gospel, they are always talking about the judgment that is coming soon when the Lord Jesus returns to this earth.

Now there are even some who preach the gospel today, but they do not preach the second coming. If they do preach the second coming, it is not the imminent return of the Lord. They preach the second coming, but by the time you look at their chart, you see it cannot possibly happen until there are about four or five sets of hoops that the enemy starts jumping over and we start jumping the other way. So they preach that it is not immediate, but it is going to come one day. How many Christians vote for Jesus to come back? “Amen.” How many believe He is coming back any moment? “Well ...” One preacher always used to say, “I believe in going to heaven but I do not want to go out in the next busload.” There are a lot of people who want Jesus to come back but not right away—not till I get married or make my million dollar goal or retire or finally get that home I have been trying to get.

THE FINAL LINK IS A PEOPLE WHO ARE WATCHING AND WAITING WITH FAITH

So we come back to that first beginning point for those who will be watching and waiting. The final link or the generation of those people who will bring in the Lord, are a people who are watching and waiting with faith. They have to look past the clouds of the scoffers and the skeptics, and the wise theologians who have reinterpreted the second coming to mean it is already here, or it has already happened, or it is not exactly going to happen, or it is a spiritual happening, or whatever. There is every kind of excuse to say, "I believe in the second coming without believing in the immediate second coming." The first step for that generation who will see Him come back is for our eyes to be opened to realize the imminence of His coming. How close is His coming? Those people who will be that last generation and linked to His coming will be those who can see Him at the gates, who sense Him at the doors, who know He is around the corner, who are upon the walls of Zion saying, "Behold, here is Your God. He is coming." So it always gets back to vision, doesn't it?

VISION FOR THE ETERNAL THINGS THAT CANNOT BE SEEN

Our first overcoming is to see with a vision that looks not at the things that can be seen but at the things that cannot be seen. The things that can be seen are temporary and under the sun. The things that cannot be seen are eternal and they are about to happen. A whole new age is coming in, and it is working right now over our heads. That battle is about to begin in the heavenlies and maybe we do not even see it. We need to see unseen things.

Repentance Because We Are Not Ready

Before Samuel could be that link, he had to see his God to be a seer. Zacharias was as faithful as you can get, but he had to see what God was planning to do before he became part of that generation that brought in the Lord Jesus. John the Baptist himself was brought to a vision before the Lord in which the Lord said, "When you baptize somebody and you see the Spirit of God coming down and resting on Him, you are going to know that is the One." That man walked by faith, baptizing a whole bunch of tourists in the Jordan River. But when he saw the One whom the Holy Spirit came upon and the Father spoke from heaven and said, "Behold the Lamb of God," he lived in preparation of that. Even before he saw Jesus, he was already baptizing people saying, "There is Somebody coming. There is Somebody coming. I do not know what He looks like, but I know He is coming. You better get ready; you better get baptized." The generation that is going to bring in the Lord are people who are right now actively repenting. Are you turning? The Hebrew word *shub* simply means "you are turning." The Lord is turning you from something. This generation that is going to bring in the Lord repents. And why do they repent? Because they know they are not ready.

We have heard things so simple and yet so profound that should be a turning point for us. If we are not ministering to the Lord, do we think we will be that generation that is ready for the Lord's return? If we do not have time to minister to the Lord with first love, are we ready? Repent.

I know there are some churches who talk repentance all the time until your repenter wears out. We are thinking as we repent: "I have to go through some Pentecostal ordeal; go down to the altar, get on my knees, cry for a half hour, and it is a repentance. No, repentance is really seeing the truth and turning from what is false. If you do not believe Jesus could come back even while we are right now talking, repent. You are living in a wrong place. You are not seeing things unseen. You are not sensing spiritual pressures. It is hard though. After two thousand years we are still reading: "He is coming back soon. He is coming back soon. Behold I am coming quickly." That Scripture has been around for two thousand years. Now if you have a good mind you can figure out some kind of a rationalization of how to believe "yes, I am coming quickly," without believing "yes, I am coming quickly." Repent of that. Therefore, the first thing is that we have to see that He is coming soon, and when we see that we are not ready, we repent and then we get ready.

ZACHARIAS, ELIZABETH, ANNA, SIMEON

I will be sharing about the hidden ones which brings us to Zacharias, Elizabeth, Anna, and Simeon. This is a picture that shows us not only the hidden life of the prepared vessel but also the public life. I think it is given to us in order that we may understand what it means to be ready for the Lord's coming. It does seem to be a bit of a contradiction to have a hidden life and yet to have a public ministry. Indeed this vessel of preparation or this vessel of linkage will have both. There will be Zacharias, Elizabeth, Anna, and Simeon. And there will be John the Baptist out in public.

I want us to consider these as a community. I am going to take these people and put them together as if they were in one assembly which, of course, they were not; they were scattered about living in the Judean hills and various places. But just to make a point and so we may know what sort of people we ought to be in holy conduct and godliness as we are waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, we will observe what this people looks like. There is a preparatory group who are laying the tracks even now, putting down those final ties and driving those stakes into the tracks for the Lord Jesus to come back. What sort of people ought we to be who are working on the railroad? What will our lives look like? I think the Lord gives us this wonderful picture.

THE MEANING OF HIDDEN ONES

Before I begin in Luke to consider the lives of these people, I would like to answer the question you may have: What does "hidden ones" mean? What does this involve? Actually we find the Lord mentioning His hidden ones in many places and in different ways, including Psalm 83. Asaph had a peculiar revelation and insight into things. He saw things the way they really were. Often as Israel was worshipping and celebrating and feeling good, Asaph was seeing these problems.

Do not keep silent, O God!
Do not hold Your peace,
And do not be still, O God!
For behold, Your enemies make a tumult;
And those who hate You have lifted up their head.

They have taken crafty counsel against Your people,
And consulted together against Your [hidden] ones.
They have said, "Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation,
That the name of Israel may be remembered no more" (Psalm 83: 1-4).

This crafty enemy has finally ferreted out that the reason Israel was continuing on despite the foreign invaders, which is the context here, is because there were some hidden ones. As we read the history of Israel, we find that the whole nation went up and down, up and down; sometimes feverishly righteous but more often backslidden and cool. Nevertheless, there were the hidden ones. And sometimes the enemy is crafty enough to realize that if he can just take out the hidden ones, he will have the rest. Therefore, these hidden ones get targeted.

Who are these hidden ones we are talking about? For the most part, they remain under the radar. The media does not know about them; they just do not know what is going on. The powers that be do not know. Wasn't it amazing that King Herod, the king of his kingdom, was surprised when somebody suddenly came up to him and said, "Excuse me, king, I think there was a King born in your neighborhood?" Jesus was born in such humility among the hidden ones that it shook Herod up.

These Ones Are Not Important to the World

These hidden ones are not prominent or huge. It does not mean they have to be a group of under twenty-five people. It could be a large assembly of God's people. But they are hidden ones, nonetheless, to all that the world counts important. They are hidden more specifically, because no matter who we speak about of these hidden ones, they were all righteous. They were righteous. That means two things. It does not mean perfect. 1) They were truly pious. They were keeping the Law, and they really meant the prayers they were praying. 2) They were doing good deeds

These are People of Good Works and Are Righteous

God's hidden ones are not people sitting somewhere frozen, isolated, stymied or paralyzed. No, they are people of good works and are righteous. I think if you trace down through the history of the church or the history of Israel, you will not find one of God's vessels in an epoch-changing time who was not righteous. Today, there is a version of super grace, as it is called, that is flaunting its unrighteousness because they say it shows how much God can forgive. The Lord will have none of that among His hidden ones. These are the ones who, today, if they are waiting for the Lord Jesus are declaring "you are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God"—a hidden one. And the Lord takes these hidden ones and manifests them in His time.

These are Praying People

A third reason we can say that they are hidden is because they have found their focus of their life to be in the hidden secret place. In other words, they were praying people. How do we find our sustenance? We pray. The ravens came to Elijah who was one of the hidden ones. We do not know much about Elijah's life, but he showed up one day. He had a whole hidden life before he appeared on the scene.

As we look at Samuel in I Samuel 3 and 4, we will say this man was a great prophet, who stood prominently and judged Israel. But how about all of those silent years where he prayed and ministered to the Lord? Hidden people know where the resource is, where the answer is, where their supply is. They have checked it out. I do not know how John the Baptist found out that locust and honey were a good meal. He must have had one of those stark-reading health books they have come out with today. They say, "Anything that tastes good is no good." But however he did it, he knew who his Supplier was. He grabbed a locust, ate it and said, "Thank you Lord." He was an amazing man.

The Lord Hid These Ones in His Hands

The main reason they were hidden ones is because the Lord hid them in His hands—"He that dwells in the secret place of the Most High." They are hidden by the Lord. We love to sing that song: "One thing have I desired of the Lord." The second verse is: "For in a time of trouble He will hide me in His pavilion." How the Lord cares for these hidden ones!

The Lord Remembers His Hidden Ones

How the Lord remembers those dear saints in Malachi! Malachi is a tragedy. What do you do when the remnant comes home, they are serving God and two generations later they have grown cold? What can you do with them? They were asking questions: "How do You love me God? Enumerate the ways, I have forgotten. I am living here in this tough situation. What do You mean I have robbed You; I gave You an offering even though it was a three-legged lamb." What a tragedy! When the remnant grows cold, where else can the Lord turn? The parents sacrificed and the kids had an attitude. Surely there needs to be repentance. Nevertheless, there were a few people who were talking to one another about the Lord and who still esteemed His name. The Lord remembers them: "You shall be Mine. In that day, I will prove those people who are not faithful and those who are, and you will shine in the Sun of righteousness." That is a wonderful promise. There are those hidden ones, who are hid by the Lord, and supplied by the Lord.

MATTHEW AND MARK FOCUS ON THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM

In Matthew and Mark's Gospels, in order to focus upon the Lord Jesus and rightly so as He is the main link in the gospel, they begin their gospels with the pronouncement of the coming of the kingdom by John the Baptist. Immediately, they showed him coming on the scene, proclaiming repentance, the kingdom of God is at hand, and then the gospel of the kingdom of heaven began. It is a wonderful gospel that included John and his wonderful part. He was a prophet of the Most High.

LUKE RECORDS THE EVENTS REGARDING JESUS

But our dear brother Luke, whom we assumed after he got saved, decided as a labor of love to begin gathering notes on all the events of the happenings regarding Jesus. Somewhere in his travels, he met Mary, the mother of Jesus. And in the first two chapters of Luke were unearthed from the secrets she treasured in her heart of what went on behind the scenes

among the hidden ones before John ever came on the scene. When we read this beautiful story before us, we realize this is so typical because even though Luke found these things through Mary and perhaps others, we discover that the truth of these hidden ones can be found throughout the Old Testament and the age of grace. Israel was up and down, sometimes united as a nation and sometimes divided, but underneath that larger scheme of things, there was always that remnant who remained faithful.

WHO IS ON THE LORD'S SIDE?

When Moses came down the mountain and saw the children of Israel dancing, having an orgy, and worshipping the golden calf, he actually wrote the first line of a famous hymn we sing today: "Who is on the Lord's side?" And the Levites rose up with swords and slew three thousand idolaters. They were a remnant who had stood with the Lord. Who is on the Lord's side? When things were really necessary, suddenly these Levites revealed themselves.

After the nation was divided, there was the southern area of Judah and the northern tribes of Israel. And Israel immediately began to plunge themselves into worshipping Baal, despite all of Elijah's best efforts. He was quite discouraged and the Lord said to Elijah: "There are seven thousand just like you who did not bow their knees." The hidden ones were still around.

In Daniel we see the hidden ones who were praying for the return of the captivity. When Cyrus finally made a decree, there were some hidden ones whose spirits stirred them up to sacrifice all and return to Jerusalem to build the house of the Lord. They have always been there in the history but sometimes not seen right away, especially in times of prosperity. However, when times are tough, we see who the real ones are, the hidden ones.

Throughout church history, it is the same way. Down through the dark ages of the church, when the church grew big and fat and thought it was the kingdom of God on earth, there were the little ones, these hidden ones, most of them unknown to us. But because of history, we find little traces of groups here and there who did the heroic thing of wanting to do what the Bible says, wanting to worship the Lord the way the Bible says, wanting to believe in salvation the way the Bible says. And these little groups of pilgrim churches were persecuted and dogged and purged from city to city, from country to country all over Europe down through the centuries of the dark ages. Nevertheless, there have always been the hidden ones even in the midst of such difficult times. But even after the Reformation, when the good news was that we are all saved by grace, the Protestant church split apart into a thousand pieces, and now there are so many denominations among Protestants you cannot even find a list of them. They just put up a big infinity sign. But there are still the hidden ones, the precious ones who have always been there.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GENERATION WHO WILL BRING IN THE LORD

Luke gives us a picture in which we see some of the characteristics of the generation that will hasten and bring in the return of the Lord. The first thing that we see, as we look over the whole group, is surprising. These were the most ordinary, humble, simple, prosaic, colloquial people you could find. Paul did say that not many noble, wise or mighty are called. God loves to find these little people who are sincere and simple and then do great things through them. We have been hearing about Samuel and Hannah, just little people. In these first two chapters of Luke, these are all little people. They have nothing to commend themselves as being something

great, but God loved them. When God began to do something, none of them pretended to understand what was going on. They had one thing in common, as simple as they were, they heard what the Lord asked, and they obeyed. Most of them had no idea how it fit into the larger scheme. How could you grasp that great plan of bringing in the Link down from heaven to save all mankind? The people said, "I am a handmaiden, Lord; do whatever You want." They were all very human and very humble.

If you study the books regarding being an overcomer, some of them are pretty exotic. There is an elite there; "I am on guard force." They are all crack troops, navy seals for God. They know their Bibles backward and forward. They can spit it out in Hebrew and Greek. They can preach the gospel and evade the enemy. There is a great and noble group of God's navy seals.

They Were Righteous and They Obeyed

However, when you look in the record, who do you find? Zacharias. It is a shock. But it is telling us that that generation who will prepare the coming of the Lord is just a regular bunch of people. They were righteous and they obeyed. This word *obedience* is not in the book anymore and it is not preached. Only simple ones obey. It is a frightening thing when you go to a new developing country and you preach the gospel from the Bible, and then they start doing it. It is so shocking that you want to say: "No, no, don't really do that." The church has learned to interpret everything but a new believer just believes it.

Our brother mentioned about F.B. Meyer and his communication with C.T. Studd on this one occasion when they were staying in the same house. F.B. Meyer was a young famous preacher, and one morning early he went into C.T. Studd's room, who was walking around with a blanket over him reading his Bible. F. B. Meyer said, "What are you doing?" Studd said, "I am reading all of the commandments to see if there are any the Lord wants me to do today." Obedience. It is not so strange. Oh, if we would turn and be obedient to the Lord's call and stop saying, "I heard somebody else call. Is that my wife?" "No, Samuel, it is the Lord calling; turn and say, 'Speak, Lord, Your servant hears.'"

They Were Waiting for the Messiah to Come

Despite the fact that they lived in different places, which was mostly in the Judean hills, they had another thing in common which to me speaks of an important characteristic of the generation that will prepare the way. To a person, they were all awaiting the consolation of Israel. It means that they were waiting for the Messiah to come. It means they knew they were in Israel, and in fact Zacharias was serving in the house of God and was faithful. But they knew there was something more that was needed. They knew the place they were at was not enough. Even though Israel called itself the kingdom of God, and there was a pretender, Herod, on the throne, who was the so-called king of Israel, they knew they needed a real King. They were not satisfied. They were simple people. They were not a people who decided to have a rebellion and leave the organized temple and build another one. All they knew was this: "Even though we are here, and obeying the Lord as He speaks to us day by day, we are waiting because we know there is something more, and it has something to do with the coming of the Messiah." They were all waiting for that.

I believe if we are the generation that is really waiting for the coming of the Lord, then we are not satisfied. It sounds almost crooked to say that because the Lord has blessed us so much. Has the Lord blessed you so much that He has brought you to repentance? Has the goodness and kindness and forbearance of the Lord brought us to repentance when we realized we have the best that life can have, and we know that it is not enough? Until our Lord Jesus comes back, we must cry out with those widows for righteousness, for the Righteous One. I suppose these dear ones were interceding because they had a deep sense of something missing, a deep longing for righteousness, a deep longing that Israel could be Israel, a testimony, and not this huge machine that was going on and clouding the way to God. These little ones sensed that. Even when you have great Christian things going on and there are many people sitting in these large congregations, the little ones realize that there is something there that is not truly a testimony of Jesus.

You face many dangers when you go and speak in different places. Once in a while, I go to some place that does me in. Maybe I go with my guitar; I get up and sing or share, and the people stand up and applaud. That is something that Christians do today, and it just undoes me. That is not right. What are we doing? Are we applauding a performance? That guy preached good, let's give him a round of applause. There is something about the church that is so ghosh. There is no humility about the thing. Well, this little group of hidden ones knows there is something wrong, that there is something more, there is something that can only come in with a move of God; only God can do this for us.

They Had Wasted Their Lives

That leads us to a third characteristic of this group as a whole and that is all of them had basically wasted their lives. Think of Anna remaining a widow all of those years, just praying and praying and praying. What a waste! Zacharias and Elizabeth were serving God all the time and had no kids. What a waste! All of these people seemed to have wasted their lives on the Lord, ministering to the Lord, and waiting the consolation of Israel. Their lives were a waste until the Lord showed up and then their lives were of glory.

When God Moved They Were Overwhelmed with Joy

The fourth thing we take notice of in this little group of hidden ones as a whole is that when God moved, they were overwhelmed and beside themselves with grace and joy. These little ones were so faithful all this time. Can you imagine being one of these little ones? For the joke of it, let's put us in the Judean hillside community. We have all been praying for years and serving God in Israel. You are a Christian, and you are running a tour guide. For years you have been doing this kind of thing in your community or in the Judean hills, God begins to move His finger, and an angel shows up. You have been serving God as a priest for a long time and suddenly an angel shows up. You might lose your voice.

Imagine Mary in the same condition. These are the little ones suddenly filled with the Spirit and prophesying things that were as magnificent as the prophecies before the great centuries of silence. Where did they get that gift of prophecy? As they were prophesying, only the little ones heard. We find in Luke I that John the Baptist was hidden until the time he was manifested out of the wilderness to Israel. These little ones were so filled with joy when God moved that

everything was satisfied in their hearts—spirit fullness, prophesy, angels visitations. They were rejoicing in knowing: “God has visited us!”

This is about the fortieth conference that started back in Richmond in 1973. Some folks have been faithfully coming all these years, serving God, working with kids as long as they could work with kids. Faithful, faithful, faithful. Forty years of conferences would be worth it if God has visited us—the joy in our hearts, the repentance, the immediate sense of the coming of the kingdom, the reality of it all. How wonderful when God visits His people! It is overwhelming even when it is in a quiet way in the bypass when people do not know what is going on. But when you sense the finger of God moving, that is a wonderful thing. Now you have been praying and your prayers are being answered. God is showing up and is beginning to move; now the kingdom is moving. What we are yet to see is a visitation that God’s finger has moved and this final phase is coming in. What a wonderful group of little ones! May we be so small and know the joy!

Think of Elizabeth; after all those years of barrenness, is there any woman more gracious than she after her pregnancy?

ZACHARIAS

Zacharias characterizes some things for us. He is a man of God. We see in these hidden ones as God prepares to do something new and transitions into something else that Zacharias was deeply committed and connected with the house of God. Now you might think that God would choose someone who had nothing to do with the temple; but no, Zacharias was fully involved in the house of God. When Samuel was being prepared in those secret years, we know that it was being done in the house of God. When God is doing something new and raises up a generation of people that have vision, who are being prepared, are repenting and being made ready, these are people who have been connected with the house of God and who have been faithful in serving in the house of God. There is a certain tribe of rebels who move from place to place, never satisfied, criticizing everything, but they are never obedient, faithful, giving, or part of the house of God. I do not see how God can do something of His heart out of rebels. But here is Zacharias. You cannot not call him righteous, pious, and faithful in the house of God.

For you young people and those of you who are thinking: “Well, I am going to go to an easier place where I can sit back. I am tired of the house of God, I am tired of setting up folding chairs,” I do believe God’s eyes run to and fro all across the earth looking to show Himself strong to those who are loyal in heart. Are you loyal to the Lord? Do you have a devoted heart? In the most secret and unassuming way, are you there for the Lord when he needs help with hospitality and driving somebody somewhere? One day God will visit you in your car. He will visit you while doing the dishes saying, “Good job. Well done.”

Zacharias was faithful to the house of God. You find brothers in various assemblies who have stepped up and taken the grace of God and shared words and Scriptures in a Bible study with the group they are in, and then they see the Lord and the Lord has to readjust them in a period of silence, and recalibrate them because of what they have seen. After Zacharias saw the angel, he could not speak; he was set aside for nine or ten months. But when he was released, he was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied.

Dear brothers, thank you for your faithfulness. I know many of you by the grace of God will share the Word because you were asked. May the Lord touch you with a vision, even if you have to go through a time of silence, and you come out the other side filled with the Holy Spirit. Such an assembly can only be blessed when the hidden ones are willing to be dealt with by the Lord because of the vision they have seen.

ELIZABETH

Elizabeth falls into a network of dear sisters who have been faithful in service and are unfruitful in their own blessing. Even though the desire of her heart had not been fulfilled, she had served the Lord. Immediately, this takes us back to Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel or Hannah—faithful sisters. I do not know if Elizabeth was like Martha—so able except in the one thing she wanted to be able, and so frustrated in that one desire to have a child. This was a cloud over her, and some people thought she must have done something wrong. Yet she lived faithfully, faithfully all that time, and the Lord remembered her. Of course, there was no one more gracious than she after she felt that life within her.

I notice as I travel around the assemblies that there are some sisters who are so faithful; they do almost everything. The men sit at the city gate and watch the football game while the sisters do everything. There are so many Marthas and so many faithful ones. At some point in their lives, as they are faithfully going on, they sense their own fruitlessness. Many of them have that feeling that there is something more. Then they discover the life of Christ within. Have you ever seen such a sister? Once she was busy, always trying to do something for the Lord, then she discovers Christ in her and oh, she is so filled with grace.

We see this in Elizabeth when she sees Mary and says, “Oh praise God!” She is so happy, rejoicing, filling the hillsides of Judea with stories of the goodness of God—this one who was barren for a long time. Isn't it interesting how sometimes the Lord withholds things from us because His intention is to bring us to a higher fruitfulness for His kingdom and His service. When we discover that and make the transaction with the Lord and say, “Lord, I want Your fruitfulness and not mine,” something happens in our life. We see this in this precious glowing Elizabeth.

MARY

Mary told all of these stories in Luke 1 and 2. It has to be that she treasured the Lord in her heart. She was one of those bearers of treasures in an earthen vessel that we find in so many assemblies. In some assemblies, if the brothers went off for a three-week vacation and fished, they would come back and everything would be fine. If the sisters went off for two weeks and came back, there would be chaos in the assembly, babies crying, things left undone, a fight had broken out. There are those Marys who are really the guardian of the church. Their love and reality and presence of Christ directs us sometimes in prayer meetings when we have gone astray and brings in that million dollar love when everybody else is murmuring. You have to have Mary in your little hidden group because she brings in a kind of stability when the church is going through problems too deep for expression. Thank God for Mary.

ANNA

Anna was one of those whom we could say was faithful, faithful, praying, praying. Thank you, brothers and sisters, who are willing to pray week after week about things everybody else has given up on.

SIMEON

When we consider Simeon, that old prophet, there is a reward for brothers who teach with prophetic vision and hold fast to the word of patience. They say, "The Lord is coming." They show a vision of the Lord, and they are faithful in that prophecy. All that time, Simeon had that promise in his heart: "You will not die until you see the Messiah," And he believed it. When everyone else said, "Oh, for crying out loud, Simeon, how many years have you believed that?" The scoffers would tell him to take it this way or that in interpretation. No, we need among the hidden ones a real prophetic word. It is the word with insight and promise. That is what we need in the hidden place and the Lord supplies a Simeon.

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA

Then we will look at one more. In Luke 23 we find someone else who was joined together with the rest of them because of this which he had in common with them. We will see immediately how dear Joseph of Arimathea was considered in this band of hidden ones.

"Now behold, there was a man named Joseph, a council member, a good and just man. He had not consented to their counsel and deed. He was from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who himself was also waiting for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus" (50-52).

It is a wonderful thing and it is all the sovereign hand and work of God that sometimes among the hidden ones, the Lord does bring someone of stature or of character just like Joseph of Arimathea. This was a man of means and a man of reputation. And at the crucial time, he stood by faith among the people of God and was willing to ask for the body of Jesus when none of the hidden ones would dare to go. He stood up and came out in the open and declared his faith. We cannot sell anyone short. There are some who are rich and have been placed in high positions and they love the Lord with all their heart. We cannot write people off according to their salary or the house they live in. If they are grouped together with those who are waiting the consolation of Israel and the kingdom of God, then they are in the same family. They come forth at times in amazing ways. It is miraculous really how you see that happen among the people.

I just wanted to present some of these as little character pictures of those who are in the assembly of the hidden ones. How God loves the hidden ones! He is writing a book of remembrance about those little things—those obediences, those righteousnesses that are being woven into the bride's gown. He loves you as small and out of the way as you may feel you are. If you are just human, humble, pious, and willing to obey, you can be part of this group. It does not take big people.

MANY JOHN THE BAPTISTS RAISED UP FROM THE NEXT GENERATION

Finally, without this little assembly of hidden ones, John the Baptist could never have come. I do not know what your fellowship group looks like, or how long you have been meeting, whether you meet in a big or small gathering. I do not know these factors, and it is not really that important. But if the only thing that comes out of your assembling together as hidden ones over the years is that God raises up a John the Baptist, then you have done your job. Sometimes we look around and want to do things that we can tick off as great moments in our fellowship life, but if you raise up from your next generation those who love the Lord with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength and are willing to go all the way with the Lord, then you have been the womb for the coming of the messenger to bring in the kingdom. Oh, may it be that our young people, through all they go through in our assemblies, may find themselves fully prepared for that public ministry, that proclamation of the gospel that is needed in the last days. I do believe that part of the last things that will happen will be a real proclamation of the living true gospel from an assembly of people who bear a real testimony of the kingdom in their own lives—not just the life, but the proclamation. We need both, and then the end will come.

And so the Lord says in Matthew 24:14: “And so the gospel of the kingdom must be proclaimed through the whole world as a testimony to the nations, and then the end will come.

May we be some of those awaiting the second coming of our Lord!

Shall we pray:

For this we pray, oh Lord, as we come to You. And we pray that You will roll back from our eyes the cataracts of unbelief, the putting off and the sense that You are not coming back immediately. Oh Lord, we want to repent and be those who see that You are coming soon and prepare ourselves by the grace of God to be those who lay the train tracks and prepare a highway for the coming of the Lord. Oh mighty King, we know that You are waiting and we want to hasten Your coming. But we know that it starts with repentance. Turn us, Lord, turn us and we will be turned. Remove our captivity that we may serve You in holiness and righteousness, waiting on You until Your soon coming. We pray in Jesus' precious name. Amen.