

Be Prepared like the Sons of Issachar

Lord, we worship and praise You. We are so grateful for the multitude of prayers from so many saints that have gone up, and we are thankful that as we are here now, by faith we can step into those prayers. Lord, we are thankful that above all You, as our great High Priest, are making intercession for this time. And we are thankful that You have made every provision for this time. By faith we do enter in. Lord, we recognize the days, the times that we are living in, and we recognize this call and this theme of being prepared. And I believe each one of us are here with that simple desire of wanting to be those who are ready for Your return. So we open our hearts to You, Lord, and really look to You in a marvelous way to speak to each and every one of us. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

We are thankful that we can gather once again, and as we know from the many tee shirts we have already seen and from the handbook that the theme this year is “Be prepared.” And it is always good to ask where that theme came from. It originated last year as we were gathering around the theme, “Ye have need of endurance.” And quite often throughout that time our brother Stephen would ask us a simple question: “Are you ready?” He would ask it with an emphasis and with a genuine burden, and I appreciated him sharing that because it was like a father figure to us really crying out from his heart of love and concern for us: “Are you really ready?”

The Lord is Concerned for the Condition of His Disciples

It is wonderful how we have these dear ones who go before us who have been through much, and they see what is ahead of us. Sometimes in our lack of experience there is an element of naivety in the days we live in, and some, like our brother, who have been through things are simply crying out that we would be those who wake up and recognize the time, the urgency of the days we are living in. Even when our Lord was upon the earth, the disciples came to Him and said, “When are You coming back? What are the signs of the time? What is going to happen? What is all this?” At times our Lord would mention various sequence of events, but there was one thing that was always upon our Lord’s heart far more than the sequence of events. It is good that we can study and have our thoughts related to the sequence of events and things that will happen, but when you really look at what our Lord shared, the thing that was primarily upon His heart for His disciples was their condition. He cried out to them over and over again: “Are you ready?”

The Contrast between a Faithful Slave and an Evil Slave

In Matthew 24 many of the parables there are from the Sermon of Olivet, and in verse 44 the Lord is speaking with His disciples, saying, “For this reason you be ready too, for the Son Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.” Then He continues on to tell a parable about a faithful slave and an evil slave, and He makes a contrast. This parable is really speaking of one slave not two, because as we are entering into these days we have a choice set before us: Are we

going to be the faithful slave or are we going to be the evil slave? The contrast between the two was that one was concerned for the master. He was looking for the master's return, and he was caring for the things within the master's house. He had a heart, and he was looking, anticipating and wanting to be ready for the master to come. What the master had entrusted to him was not anything spectacular, but he was simply faithful. The Lord said, "Watch after my house; take care of those in the house." And this dear one simply took care of those. He did what was asked of him; he did what was put into his hands.

But the other had made his choice and became that evil slave. He said, "My master delays." The evil one is self-centered, just living for himself, not caring about others within the house, not caring about the things of the master. And we find ourselves with this question before us in this day and time we are living in: What are the affections of our heart set upon? Are our hearts set upon the things of our Master? Do we care about His return? Do we care about the things in His house? Do we care about our brothers and sisters? Or are we simply living for ourselves and not concerned about others? Are we just looking out for our own selves and our own interests? The choice is ours, and we are thankful that one slave made a choice for the master.

The Issue is the Heart

I believe that each one of us, because we have made a choice to be here this week, are coming not for an academic session on how to be made ready. I believe most of us, as we have walked through this life, as the Lord has been touching us, realize more and more that it is not the outward performance that our Lord is interested in. The Lord is looking at our hearts. That is what He is seeing. And I believe each one of us recognizes the condition of our heart and can see that our heart is not where it should be. We are thankful for all that He has done, but we want our heart to be in an even greater place of being attracted to Him. We do not want to be serving other gods; we do not want to be serving the idols of this world. We want our hearts fully given to Him to be about His will and His purpose.

As we look at the various parables that our Lord shared, this was the thing upon His heart. He was desiring for ones to be faithful and looking for those who could walk in wisdom, ones who were ready, ones who had that enabling power of the Holy Spirit through having done some transactions with Him, and having that oil ready in reserve for His return. We do not know what is ahead of us. When He talks about being prepared, we do not know in many ways what we are being prepared for because we do not know what is ahead; but we know Who is ahead. And the way that we become prepared is the way that we have made it thus far which is simply keeping our eyes upon Him. As we set the eyes of our heart upon the affection of our Master and we are looking at Him, He can continue to prepare us in a way that will be a testimony unto Him in this hour.

You see in different ones in the New Testament how this issue of the heart being in a right place was so upon their hearts. Oftentimes Paul would speak about a sequence of events in Thessalonians and other places, but as he is writing to the church in Ephesus and preparing them

he writes, "Awake, oh sleeper, arise from the dead, and be careful how you walk. These days are evil, so be careful how you are walking. Walk as wise men, not as foolish ones. Understand the will of God and do daily transactions with Him, having that intimate personal relationship with Him."

Peter encouraged the saints in a similar way in his epistle when he talked about the day of the Lord and His coming. Peter asked that question: "What type of people ought we to be in our conduct, in our walk, in our character?" We are to have that godly character because it is that character our Lord is after. Our Lord is looking for the life of His Son manifested in His people. This is what is really upon His heart, and this is what the Lord is desiring to work within each one of us as we have this time together this week. He does not want us to be so focused upon the sequence of events and things related to that. He knows we will have our opinions; He knows we will have our various thoughts about these things. That is why He said, "I am going to come at a time when you do not think I will." I guarantee you (and I think anytime you guarantee something you are already on thin ice) in all of the various theological interpretations I believe when the Lord returns, every one of us is going to be surprised one way or the other. Whatever we may be thinking there is going to be some element of Him, something of His fullness, and something about His return that is going to astonish and surprise us in a marvelous way because there is going to be a fullness of Him that we have not seen. We are so limited in our thinking and our thoughts, but there is such a fullness in Him, and this is what He is after.

We are desiring to be prepared in this way, but He is looking for us to grow in this experiential union that we have in Him in the Spirit, that will enable us to know Him in a greater and fuller way and to keep looking for that day when we see Him. We are looking for that glorious time that it speaks of in Revelation 11:15b: "The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever." This is the desire of our hearts. We are desiring for our King to come; we are desiring for that kingdom to be set up and we want to be those who are hastening His return. That is why we are taking this opportunity to be together in His presence.

The Transfer of the Kingdom

As we look at the Scriptures we are thankful that as we have these questions of desiring to be ready and prepared, the Scriptures are full of beautiful pictures of examples of being prepared. It talks in I Corinthians how the Old Testament was written for our instruction. Many examples in the Old Testament are written for our instruction upon whom the end of the days have come; it is specific there. As we are desiring for this kingdom to come we were looking for examples on this matter of being prepared. We were thinking about a story or a picture in the Old Testament of when that kingdom came and it drew us to I Chronicles 12. There we discovered a time when they were getting ready for a great transfer of the kingdom. The kingdom of Saul was getting ready to be transferred to David who had been anointed king by Samuel many years before but was not publicly recognized as king of Israel.

In I Chronicles 12 we find those great men gathered together. They had suffered rejection with David, they had been through many difficult times, they had learned under the direction of David to be those mighty men, to be those ones who had a heart for his interest, and to be those ones who were overcoming in the midst of persecution. They were ready to transfer the kingdom of Saul to the kingdom of David, and they were gathered there with a singleness of heart and a singleness of purpose.

And that is the same reason that we are here because we are desiring to see this great transfer of the kingdom of our Lord. We know that Jesus is King of all the earth, but He is not publicly recognized as King upon this earth. Many do not recognize it, but we know good and well that there is coming that day when everybody will know that He is King, when His kingdom comes and every knee will bow before Him. Praise God! We already know that and we can bow the knee now, and we are so privileged to do that. Therefore, we want to look at these dear ones who had gathered to make David king to see how they had been prepared, so that we in a similar way can allow the Lord to prepare us for this great transaction, this great transfer of the kingdom that is coming in our day and time.

Understanding the Times

I Chronicles 12:32 is the theme verse which is related to the sons of Issachar. "Of the sons of Issachar, men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do, their chiefs were two hundred; and all their kinsmen were at their command."

And the phrase that has caught our attention as we had our planning session and have been praying is this: "The sons of Issachar, men who understood the times and with knowledge of what Israel should do." There are two vital characteristics here: they understood the times and they knew what Israel should do. It was so vital and essential then, and it is just as vital and essential now. It is so vital that the Lord would have a people who understand the times. As we look around, the times are pretty obvious. We see the signs of the time, but every day we see another sign. If we started listing them now, we could just go on and on. A few years ago we could list a few things, but the signs are increasing with even more rapidity now. We are seeing them over and over again with more and more intensity, and it is not only understanding the signs of the time but knowing what the church should do, knowing how we as the people of God should be completely giving ourselves over to Him to do His will and to be prepared for His return. This is what God is after in this hour, and this is why we are here this week.

The Battle Over the Kingdom

I am not going to go into this particular verse because our brothers will probably be elaborating on it more throughout the week. But first I would like to consider this matter of the setting here in I Chronicles 12. Why were these ones there? One of the beautiful things about it is that each one of them was there because they made a choice to be there. It was a free will choice; none of them were obliged to be there. Saul was still king; he had all the power; he was reigning; David was a fugitive; he had not yet been anointed king. And at the beginning of I Chronicles 12 we read that Saul is still king. As you come to the latter part of I Chronicles 12, Saul

is now dead and these men were gathered there in Hebron. But we know from the book of Kings that there was still a continued war between the house of David and the house of Saul; it was not an easy transition. There was a battle going on, a tremendous battle that was going to take place. This was a war.

And the days in which we are living there is a great battle over the testimony of Jesus. Any of us who really desire to be a testimony of Jesus, either in our individual lives or in our lives together, quickly realize as we go through these days that there is a tremendous battle over the testimony of Jesus.

These Men of War Loved their King

I love how in verse 38 it summarizes and gives us a beautiful picture of why these ones were there. Verses 23-37 list the ones who were there in Hebron to make David king, and then it says, "All these, being men of war who could draw up in battle formation, came to Hebron with a perfect heart to make David king over all Israel; and all the rest also of Israel were of one mind to make David king."

I love this verse because it really shows us how these ones were there. They were not only gathered but they were prepared. And what are some of the indications that we see of how David had worked to bring about some work of preparation? These ones were not just scattered, but they had learned under discipline and had been under some training in order for them to be there. I love how it says that they were there with a singleness of purpose. Everybody was not there just to do what was right in their own eyes, but they were there with a singleness of purpose. They were there for no other reason than to make David king.

I think this speaks volumes to us. What are we about in these days? Is there a singleness of purpose within our hearts in this day and time to make our Lord Jesus Christ King of our lives individually and together? There is a singleness of purpose that He is desiring us to be brought into. This is an aspect of our preparation of knowing and being clear what God is calling us to in this hour—not only a singleness of purpose but a singleness of heart. It says that they were gathered with a perfect heart. Now that is not a sinless heart, but it is a singleness of heart. Their affection was drawn to David; there was a love for their king. Whatever they could do for their king, they were going to do it. They were not distracted by other things nor did they have their affection set on other things. They had been captured by their love for the king.

And this is the question we have before us. Have our affections been captured by our King? Has the love of Christ captured us in a way that we are constrained by the love of Christ, that we are no longer living for ourselves but living for Him who has loved us and died for us? Those are the ones who are prepared to bring in the kingdom. This is what the Lord is calling us to in this hour, that we have no other affections, but we would have that singleness of affection.

The Sons of Issachar were Only a Part of the Whole

As we look at this list I love how it speaks of each individual family that was there. Each individual family was very unique. Each individual family had within them a great variety of skills, but they were united as one. Each family was vital; each family was essential. We are focusing upon the sons of Issachar, but they were not there by themselves. They were part of the whole because they could not do it by themselves. They could have all of the understanding and all the wisdom of what Israel should do, but they could not do it by themselves. They were dependent upon all of the others that were with them, who had a great diversity of experience and gifts and how the Lord was using them, and they had been brought into a oneness of testimony.

And this is what the Lord is calling us to in this hour. There is a great diversity of the Lord's life being manifested through many brothers and sisters and many varied ways in which His life comes forth. But are we using it for ourselves, or are we really allowing the Lord to bring us into this place of an experiential unity of the body of Christ? Not an outward ecumenical way but really allowing His life to bring us together into a oneness of experiencing that daily and allowing through the working of the cross to deny ourselves, caring for others and having all of our affection upon the things of the Lord. I think it is important for us as we are focusing mainly upon the sons of Issachar to remember that they were only a part.

And just as they were a part, praise God, each one of us is a part of the body of Christ. Each one of us is vital. There is no insignificant member in the body of Christ. Every member within the body of Christ is vital. The Lord needs each one of us, and He desires us to come into that experience of the unity and oneness of His life that has been put within us.

The Lord Trains His People in this Great Battle

These ones had given themselves to go through the process of being made ready. It says that they could draw up in battle formation or some translations say that they could keep rank. Now you do not draw up in battle formation without going through a lot of training. A battle formation is not just a ceremonial parade or function.

When I was in the military for a period of time, I was on a drill team, and we could draw up in all different types of formation. We would have our rifles polished, we had taps on our shoes, and we could walk together as one. We could put on a great show, throwing our rifles back and forth to each other and catching them. We could march down the street and put on a great show, but it was simply that—a show; there was no battle going on. But if all of a sudden bullets and guns had begun to fly around us, it would be a whole different thing to maintain a battle formation or keep rank in the midst of a fight. What this is talking about is that the sergeant had a plan, and in the midst of the battle you were to maintain that plan no matter what is flying around your head. When you are in a battle, you do not know where things are coming from and even the atmosphere changes, the smell changes. There is the smell of smoke and the smell of blood, and the whole dynamic changes. But these ones had been prepared to go through in such a way.

In the days in which we are living we could probably have a testimony from every brother and sister of the battles that we are in. There are many different types, but the Lord is using all of them to train us, not only individually but together. He is using them to train us in this matter of spiritual warfare, to train us in this matter of coming together to pray for His kingdom, praying for His interests and not our own.

As we think about these dear ones that were with David and the battles that they had to go through, one of the unique things you see is that of all of the battles they went through most of them were totally different. One time they would do a direct charge, another time they would go around and come in behind, another time they would set a trap and lie and wait. There were many different battles depending upon the particular situation. What worked in one battle maybe did not work in another battle.

Are we allowing the Lord to train us in such a way in this day that we understand the specific times and days we are living in, and the specific way that He wants us to battle a particular situation we find ourselves in? It might have worked a particular way last week but in this current battle there is another strategy that is needed. Do we have ones that understand the times and what we should be doing to fight the battle in that way? This can only come from the relationship with the Head. These men were with David, and when he said, "Go this way or go that way," they had ears to hear and were not questioning their leader. As they went forth the great transfer of the kingdom occurred.

May we be those who are really allowing the Holy Spirit to train us in this hour because there is a great battle in this day. It is the battle of the ages, and we can be encouraged because it is only going to get worse; it is only going to become more intense. Do not put your hope in a conservative supreme court. Praise God for it! I thank the Lord for whatever happens, but our hope is not in a conservative supreme court; our hope is in the King of kings and Lord of lords, and that is Who we are looking to and keeping our eyes upon. The sons of Issachar were a people of destiny and we, like them, are a people of destiny. They were born with a purpose. We were born with a purpose. They were God's possession. We too are God's possession. We are here to proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. They were a part; we like them are a part of the whole. They had their interest set upon the things of the king; we want to have our interest set upon the things of the King. We want to learn to do battle in the same way they learned to do battle.

Now we would like to consider together the whole history of the tribe of Issachar. We see how these dear ones end up in a place of spiritual maturity. They end up in a place of understanding what God's will is and of knowing the times. How did they get there? Did it just happen automatically? I think most of us would understand and say no. They went through a process, a growth process. So we will look at the sons of Issachar, not so much as a historical lesson, but at what they went through in order that we in a similar way can learn because we like them are a people of destiny. They went through many things, so we want to allow them to teach us.

The Great Riches We have in Christ

But before we go into the sons of Issachar I would like to read some Scriptures to remind us of what we have in Christ and the great call that He has called us to. We too have been born again. The Lord has purchased us, not just to redeem us, but He has called us with a purpose. I am going to read some verses out of Ephesians which are quite familiar, but sometimes when we have familiar verses, we can allow them to become *too* familiar, and they lose their preciousness. I am reading these verses out of Ephesians because as we consider the sons of Issachar I want us to keep these verses in the back of our mind to see what the Lord is calling us to. Just as the Lord called and destined the sons of Issachar, so He has called and destined us.

In these verses in Ephesians 1 you will notice how most of these verses are written in the past tense. The Lord has already done this for us; we have been brought into it. This is our inheritance; it is what we have in Christ.

Ephesians 1:3-12: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ."

Now we could have a whole conference on that verse. When we read that, do we really see what the Lord has brought us into? As we go on, it continues to grow. "Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace (not just according to His grace but the riches of His grace that we get to experience every day) which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will (He has revealed His Son to us), according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. (That is our God; that is His desire, the summing up of all things in Christ. And we have been brought into that.) Also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory."

These verses are ours. How we need to have this desire to enter in, to experience in reality what we have heard. These verses are familiar. I do not know how many times these verses have been read at this conference throughout the years when we have considered God's eternal purpose, but this is what the Lord is calling us to. So we want to keep in mind our divine destiny that the Lord has called us to as we look at the sons of Issachar.

The Sons of Issachar Began as Babes

We want to look back at the first mention of Issachar in Genesis 30 when he was born. I would like to look at the sons of Issachar as they go through a growth process using the same process that John uses in his epistle. We will see the sons of Issachar going from babes to the young men to the fathers. As they go through some things, there is a growing process, and I think

this is so important for us because sometimes we want to be instant fathers. We want to have instant understanding, instant wisdom, instant everything, but there is a process of entering into that. And at times that can be discouraging because we want to be already there, but the Lord is saying, “I have a way, I have a school for you, I have a gymnasium. I have a way I am going to work in your life that will bring about the training for your divine destiny.”

Issachar was the fifth son of Leah, and I very much appreciate that his mother Leah was a woman of vision. We could do a whole study on Rachel and Leah because we know Jacob loved Rachel, but at first he was not fond of Leah. But in the end I want to show you the impact that Leah had upon Jacob. At first he wanted Rachel, but in the end who does Jacob get buried with? He is buried with Leah—Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah—because she was a woman of vision. The first brothers Simon and Reuben were not so great, but then you have a Judah, a Levi, and an Issachar, three brothers. I am not really doing an expository on these verses, but I am just sharing my impressions. So when I look at those three brothers—Judah, Levi, and Issachar—I see a king, a priest and a prophet coming from this woman. A king came out of Judah, Levi was a priest, and Issachar was the prophet, the one who knew the mind of God. His name Issachar means “he will bring a reward.” And whenever I think of that word ‘reward’ my mind immediately goes to the kingdom. He will bring in that kingdom. There is something about it that he is going to bring in. So when I think of Issachar I think of one who was born with a divine destiny, a divine purpose. It was not just a causal name that was given to him, but Issachar was one who was given a divine destiny. We see a few chapters over when Jacob and all of Israel were in Egypt in captivity, Jacob goes and prays for all of his sons. Genesis 49:14-15 gives us Jacob’s prayer for his son Issachar—his prayer of blessing and his prayer of prophecy for Issachar.

Issachar was Born with a Destiny

“Issachar is a strong donkey, lying down between the sheepfolds. When he saw that a resting place was good and that the land was pleasant, he bowed his shoulder to bear burdens, and became a slave at forced labor” (Genesis 49:14-15).

He was that strong donkey, and to me he was one who was strong and industrious. He was one who was under his master, doing what his master did. But more than that, the little phrase that caught my attention in Jacob’s prayer for him are those two little words: “he saw.” What did he see? He saw a resting place that was good, and he saw a pleasant land. So when we start thinking about a resting place, a pleasant land, don’t we think particularly in the Old Testament terms of that Promised Land, that pleasant land flowing with milk and honey, all of the things of the inheritance that they had? And by simply saying that he saw, to me this meant he was destined to be that man of vision, that man of insight. He had not seen it yet in the physical aspect, but he was going to see it. For our sake too the Lord has set before us that resting place, that pleasant land. It is no longer a land; it is a Person; it is Christ. That is what the sons of Issachar saw. They saw Christ. That is what they were destined to see, and they saw Him as that resting place, that good land.

Do we want to be prepared for our Lord's return? Do we want to be prepared for this day and time? Do we really see the Lord? Do we see all the fullness and provision that we have in Him? So we can see how Issachar from the very beginning would end up knowing the times and having that understanding. He was born with this divine destiny and purpose, and we have been born with such a purpose. He had a good beginning, a great beginning. And we too from our birth have had a good beginning. We have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. There is no better beginning than that. We have been brought into Christ; there is no better beginning than that. If we think back on all that we have been brought into that we read of in Ephesians, we have a good beginning. Issachar had a good beginning, and just as he had that good beginning and he had a divine destiny, we will see how he entered into that and how we too desire to enter into this in a fuller and a greater way.

We want to look now into the book of Numbers where we will find some other little tidbits about Issachar to encourage us. We see that they are still growing; they are not matured yet. In Numbers 2 we read of the arrangement of the camp, and we see that the first ones in place were the tribe of Judah. They were on the east side because that is where the sun rises. That is where the King is coming from, and that is where the morning star is. So in first place was Judah, and right next to Judah (2:5) was the tribe of Issachar. Of all the tribes the Lord had Judah first and right next to him was Issachar—that place of honor and responsibility, the place right next to the king to be as the prophet to give guidance and understanding. They were there with anticipation to lead the whole nation into God's will. Whenever the procession would start, they were in the front, leading all their brothers and sisters to where God wanted them to go. This is the spirit of the sons of Issachar, caring for the people of God and leading them into more and more of what God has for them in His purpose and His heart.

In Spite of Failure Issachar Continued On

We know at the beginning and end of Numbers there was a full census. You have to excuse the accountant in me now, but as we look at the numbers we see that the tribe of Issachar increased. At the beginning they had about 54,000, at the end they had 64,000; so during that time they had increased 20%. In a general way, the faithful tribes had increased throughout Numbers and those who were not faithful had decreased. But what we see is that through the trials and difficult times they went through there was an increase among the sons of Issachar. Again, they were not perfect because one of the various trials that they went through was when the twelve spies went into the land among which was a representative from the tribe of Issachar. We might expect that somebody from the tribe of Issachar, who was destined to see the resting place and the pleasant land, when he went into the land, he would recognize it right away and say, "This is it!" They all saw that it was good, but the giants terrified them and they had to leave. So he was categorized as one of the bad spies because he did not see that this was what God had for them. He saw it from his own perspective and not from God's. He did not see it as that place of rest.

But praise God, the sons of Issachar kept going, and by the time David came along they saw it as the good land; they saw it as the place of rest. Sometimes we can become discouraged because we do not see something. Do we see all of God's purpose now? Maybe we don't, but do not give up. This is one of the things that so encouraged me about the sons of Issachar. Even though they really blew it by being one of the bad spies, nevertheless they kept going on. Eventually these were ones who understood the times and what Israel should do because they kept pressing on.

I remember the first time I came to this family conference and heard about God's eternal purpose. As I was sitting there listening, I had no idea what they were talking about. I am a little dull, but I really did not know what they were talking about. After a while it becomes easy to pick up the vocabulary of God's eternal purpose. We learn to use certain phrases and can act like we know what we are talking about, but in reality we do not know what it is. But there was something of Christ; I did not understand what it was, but I knew there was something there, and I wanted to keep going on. And I believe that is the testimony of many brothers and sisters. We do not fully understand something at first, but as we keep pressing on God shows us.

This week the children are studying the book of Daniel. I have found great encouragement in Daniel, particularly in chapter 12, the last chapter. After the Lord had given Daniel all of those great and marvelous revelations, showing him all that was going to be happening through the end of the time, what does Daniel say? "Lord, I do not understand all this." What did the Lord say to Daniel? Did He rebuke him and say, "What do you mean? I just showed you all this." What did He say to Daniel? In the last verse, Daniel 12:13 says: "But as for you, go your way to the end; then you will enter into rest and rise again for your allotted portion at the end of the age." Continue going your way. This is a great encouragement to me.

And as we go through this Christian life there are things we do not understand. At times we can say, "I do not understand; I just need to stop and sit here until I understand." No! We keep going on; we keep following Christ and this is what the Lord was saying to Daniel: "Daniel, you do not understand now. There is a way for you to go. You are following Me; you continue on, and in the end you will see all that I have called you to."

Abraham, by faith, went out not knowing where he was going, but he went out and he ended up seeing it. There is a Proverb that I very much appreciate because it speaks about the path of the righteous being like the light of dawn and it shines brighter and brighter until the full day (see Proverbs 4:18). This is the challenge to me, one of the very practical challenges that many of us will have in this Christian life. We come to a conference and hear messages on the eternal purpose of God or this great call of being prepared or whatever, and we do not fully understand it, so we stop. But no, keep going on. We do not understand, but as we go on like that Proverb says, on the path of the righteous the light of the dawn shines brighter and brighter, and the Lord reveals more of Himself to us. This is how we press on; this is how we are prepared. This is the process of preparation, and each one of us is at a different phase in this process. But as we press on through we can encourage one another as we allow this process to really work.

At times I know in my own life I do not understand, so I just want to give up; I will never get this. No, that is just yielding to the enemy. We just keep going, following Him, and fixing our eyes upon Jesus. That is how we get understanding. The more we walk along with Him, the more we see Him, the more we will enter into all that is upon His heart. That is how these were prepared and entered into everything the Lord had for them.

The Call of Issachar to the Mountain

The next time we see Issachar is at the end of Deuteronomy, and again we have a prayer and a blessing for them. It is the prayer of Moses before they go in and possess the land. And we can even see the divine destiny of Issachar growing throughout this prayer of Moses. As we see this it does remind us of how the Lord is leading them, showing them and calling them into a fuller way.

Deuteronomy 33:18b-19: “And, Issachar, in your tents. They will call peoples to the mountain; and there they will offer righteous sacrifices; for they shall draw out the abundance of the seas, and the hidden treasures of the sand.”

Because the sons of Issachar see something of God’s heart, they see something of this pleasant land, this land of rest, they are to be those who are calling people to the mountain, calling ones out of all the stuff that is going on upon this earth and giving ones a different perspective. When the conference opened, there was the call to come up, and that was the call to the sons of Issachar. They said, “Hey, come up to the mountain. You have come to Mount Zion, now come up here; come into this heavenly place. Look for this perspective, and change your perspective.”

We need ones in this hour with that same call of the sons of Issachar to encourage us to get out of the ruts and routines of all the stuff of this life and to change our perspective so that we see things from His perspective, not ours. Our perspective is so pessimistic; there is no hope in our perspective, but in Him as we go up to that mountain the air gets fresher and clearer. You do not have the pollution and all the distractions, and there is a quietness, a serenity there. It is the presence of the Lord, and we can begin to see clearly what He is calling us to. These are the ones calling others up. It reminds me of Hebrews 10:24: “Consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking the assembling together but encouraging one another even much more as that day approaches.” That is the encouragement of the sons of Issachar, considering one another, drawing ones more and more into experiencing the riches of Christ.

As Moses is praying for the sons of Issachar, the Spirit of the Lord says, “They will draw out the abundance of the seas and the hidden treasures of the sand.” They are not just satisfied with the superficial things of the Lord. They are not satisfied with the things that are on the surface, but they are going in and drawing out the deep things of the Lord. There is a price that they pay for those treasures. Are we those who are really searching for those unsearchable riches of Christ and drawing them out? The precious thing about it is that ones like the sons of Issachar will take

the time and make the effort to really dive into the depths of Christ and bring them up for all of us, and we all get to experience the blessing of it.

I have appreciated over the years this conference and the many brothers that have shared here and drawn out the riches of Christ and laid them before us so that we could taste and see how good our Lord is. That is the spirit of the sons of Issachar; that is how they entered in to understanding the times. They took the time; they made the effort; they paid the price. They were not distracted by other things. They had one desire; they wanted to know the Lord in a fuller and greater way. They wanted to experience all of the unsearchable riches of Christ.

We read in Ephesians how we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ, but how many of those have we tasted? How many of them have we really taken the time to find out what they are? What have You brought me into? What is this inheritance? I want to experience it in a real way, not just talk about it, but to enter into that experience. This is the encouragement that we have received from the sons of Issachar. Praise God, in the book of Joshua they went in and possessed their land. Even though there is not much written about them, the fact that they went in and possessed their land is a wonderful thing. It is a tremendous fact that they went in and possessed their portion and their inheritance.

The Sons of Issachar Grow from Babes to Young Men

When we come to the book of Judges, we actually see that a great transition has taken place in the sons of Issachar because we see them growing from babes and coming into being young men. We know the setting of the book of Judges is a sad, tragic time. It is the time of Israel's history when there was no king in Israel, and everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes. And it reminds us so much of the days we are living in. Everybody just does what is right in their own eyes. But we know that God in His faithfulness raised up different judges, and one of the judges that He raised up was Deborah. The people of Israel had been under the oppression of the king of Canaan for twenty years, and the Lord found one like Deborah. And through her leadership and encouragement a great victory was won. In Judges 5 we read of the call that went out to the people of Israel to come with Barak and fight. Some tribes came and some did not come. But praise God, Issachar came.

Judges 5:15a: "And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; as was Issachar, so was Barak. Into the valley they rushed at his heels."

In the midst of this battle we find the princes of Issachar fighting, and we see a growth going on within them. They were not just self-centered and caring about themselves, but we are actually seeing within their lives the vision that had been implanted within them impacting their lives. This is one of the characteristics of moving from a babe to a young man. They had seen things, but now what they saw was beginning to impact their lives. They made a choice when that call went out to go and be with Deborah and Barak. And I love how it says, "They rushed down into the valley," because to me that says they were on the mountain. They had called others up to the mountain. You cannot go down to the valley unless you are on the mountain. They had drawn ones up to that mountain, so they were in that place of victory. They had seen from the

right perspective what to do, and they went together down that mountain and won a great victory. This is where Issachar responded and fought so valiantly, and there was a great deliverance. I was so encouraged because it was the first recorded time we actually see Issachar standing for God's interest in a real active way.

It reminded me again of I John where it speaks of the young men. The young men are characterized by their overcoming of the evil one. They had the Word of God abiding in them, and they overcame the evil one. The princes of Issachar had that Word abiding in them. They responded to that Word, to that divine destiny within them. They were caring about God's interest and allowing the Lord to lead them. And because of that they experienced more and more of the victory they had. It was no longer just a vision, but it was a reality in their lives. They heard from generation to generation as their forefathers passed down all of the things that had been prophesied. They had heard about these things, and now there was a reality that they were entering into. Have we entered into that reality? Have we entered into all that the Lord has for us? So we see how they were going through this process of growing from babes to young men.

From Young Men into Fathers

Then we come back to I Chronicles 12, which is the place where they have grown from young men into fathers. It had been prophesied over them that they would see the pleasant land; they would see that place of rest, and they would draw out those hidden things in God's treasures. Now you see these ones standing there in the reality of it. These things were there; it was real. They had learned of the Lord. They had allowed the Lord to work in their hearts in such a way that now they were prepared. They had learned of the king in such a way that they knew who the king was. They knew what was upon his heart. They knew the purpose that he had, and they understood that this was the time when the Lord wanted to make David king over all Israel. They knew what they were to do in encouraging others, and they knew that they were there for such a time as this. They were there with all the other families simply as a part—with one heart, with one mind, and one purpose to make David king. They were there as it said in I Chronicles 12:38: "All these, being men of war who could draw up in battle formation, came to Hebron with a perfect heart to make David king over all Israel; and all the rest also of Israel were of one mind to make David king." This is a beautiful picture of ones who are prepared.

With that verse set before us I would ask the question: why are we here this week? I believe this is the question that we need to have settled within our hearts. We are all at different stages in this progress of life. We have babes, we have young men, thank the Lord we have a few fathers. There is a vast experience of Christ here, and the Lord has us here with a purpose. We can be encouraged by the sons of Issachar because when you look at that moment in time in I Chronicles 12, had they always been prepared? No. Had they always understood the times? No. Had they always been faithful? No. But in spite of this they had continued following the Lord and learning of Him, and through that the Lord prepared them and had them ready for the time that they were in. This encourages me so much personally.

Learning to Sit at the Feet of Jesus

Do I fully understand God's purpose? No, but I am desiring to know more and more of it. Are we perfect, sinless? No, but we are thankful for the blood of the Lamb. Are we always faithful? No, we are not. But as we continue on, and as we have this personal daily relationship with Him, we can allow the Holy Spirit to work within us, daily preparing us and causing us to be the people of God that come into that place of having a singleness of heart. In such a way one day we will see the glorious kingdom of this world becoming the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.

As we have this opportunity this week may we really take advantage of it. It is a great privilege we have in this hour to be set apart for a time to be those in the spirit of Mary that are coming to sit at the feet of our Lord and say, "Lord, we are not ready. Make us ready. We desire Your return, and we want to be hastening Your return. We do not want to be those who are delaying it any longer. Lord, work within our hearts." May each one of us really give the Holy Spirit a great freedom within our hearts and lives.

We are very thankful for this time, and we feel that the Lord has a special purpose for it. It is not about us; it is about Him. He desires to work in each of us to show us more of His Son. Are we in a place to see more of His Son? In seeing more of His Son, we will be made a little more ready and prepared, and hopefully hastening His return in a fuller and greater way. We want to be a help to Him, not a hindrance.

The times we have together are wonderful, but take the time privately and quietly to be before the Lord and allow the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts and lives to be preparing us. And we should be really standing with our brothers, Stephen, Dana, and David, so that they may have a great freedom and liberty to speak. Oftentimes, the word given them to speak is not an easy one, but may they have a boldness and a confidence to be faithful with what He has put on their hearts. And may we and the children have a graciousness and openness of heart to receive His Word. So we are thankful we are here this week, and as we come to the Lord we are simply desiring that He would do a work of preparation within each of our hearts and lives, and we could be found cooperating with Him.

Let's pray:

Lord, as we consider this matter of being prepared, we can have some thoughts on what being prepared means. But above all we want to see what being prepared is from Your perspective, and we want You to have a great freedom and a great liberty in each of our hearts and lives to prepare us. Lord, in those areas where You want to touch us, we want to be willing to allow You to work. We do not want to be found resisting You. Even as we are here we sense a battle over this time, but we are thankful for Your victory that we have in You. And by faith we believe that You are going to do a great work, and by faith we want to be those who are really allowing You to work within each one of us. You took the sons of Issachar through much and You had them in the right place at the right time. We want to be teachable and trainable also so at that moment we would be found with You, waiting and working with You for Thy kingdom to come. In Jesus' name. Amen.

