

John the Baptist--The Message

Lord, what a precious time to be around Your table, like Mary, just sitting at Your feet, looking at You, receiving from You, worshipping You and thanking You. Lord, may we be forever a deeply grateful people in response to Your great love and mercy that You have shed upon us. Lord, we are thankful that we are a people of relationship, a people in which You desire to have fellowship and a relationship with. Lord, we thank You for that. We are truly family; we are truly ones who have the Father and a good Shepherd, our elder Brother, our Lord Jesus. We ask this morning that the Holy Spirit would anoint our time both to be able to share Your Word, to be able to hear and to respond to Your Word. We ask in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

The last time I shared it was on John the Baptist, the man. Today, I want to share on John the Baptist, his message. Three Scriptures, Matthew 3:2: "Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand." II Corinthians 5:11: "Knowing the terror of the Lord." II Corinthians 5:14: "The love of God constrains us."

God's Calling

The last time I shared on John the Baptist, the Man, John was a man who was called of the Lord. He was called to be a messenger, to be the herald of the Lord, to welcome the Lord in, to announce His arrival. He was also chosen and prepared to prepare the way of the Lord to come in. He was a chosen vessel. He was called, he was chosen, and he was anointed by the Holy Spirit to be able to carry the message, to be able to be the voice that God called him to be. God prepared this man even at a young age. We do not know exactly when he went into the desert to be before the Lord, but I would say probably it was in his early twenties. His parents were old when he was born, so it was a miracle that he was born, yet God called and anointed him from birth. The thing that was on my heart when I shared last time was this call to be a voice to prepare the way of the Lord.

Brothers and sisters, we also are called by the Lord with a holy calling, not an earthly calling, not man's calling, but a holy calling from the Holy Spirit. You have also been chosen just as John was. It says that we were chosen even before the foundation of the world. Before you were born God chose you, and He also anointed you when you accepted the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit came upon you, and you were anointed by the Holy Spirit. We are called to prepare the way of the Lord. We know that John and the age in which he lived was in the age of transition. There was going to be a new age. The law of the age and prophets was coming to an end, and John was the prophet who summed up all the previous prophets. The Lord Jesus said of John: "He is the greatest of the prophets." Why was he the greatest? He was the greatest because all the other prophets had spoken of a coming Messiah, a future Messiah, but John's message was, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand; the Messiah is here. He is among us. He is in our midst." In other words, there was going to be that great transition from the law and the prophets to the age of grace, the church age, the age in which the King has come in, and He is going to build a spiritual kingdom, not just an earthly kingdom.

My burden today is that the Lord Jesus Christ will be coming back soon. He needs a voice; He needs those who will prepare the way of His return. And, brothers and sisters, that calling, that

anointing is upon His church, but we know so much of the church today is really not following the Lord. So He has called a people in these last days to overcome the lukewarmness. Ones who really follow the Lord and are that voice to prepare the way of the soon return of our Lord Jesus Christ and the literal setting up of His kingdom upon this earth.

John's Message—Repent

Now I want to share on John's message, and let me say that John really had one message: "Repent!" That message actually had two parts. Matthew 3:1-2: "In those days John the Baptist came preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Luke 3:3-4 speaks of John the Baptist: "He went into all the region preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah, the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord."

So the message was, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand. The King is at hand. You need to repent for the forgiveness of sin."

Repentance is the Key to Preparing the Return of the Lord

Brothers and sisters, repentance was the message, and repentance was the key to preparing the way for the Lord's first return. I want to say today that I believe repentance is the key that prepares the way for the Lord's coming the second time. We think a lot of times repentance is just for unbelievers, but we know that is not true. We know that there are many times in our lives we have had to repent.

I think of Job. Even God said, "He is the most righteous man." God challenged Satan with Job's righteousness, "Have you ever seen a man so righteous?" We know the trials of Job given to us in the thirty some chapters in the book of Job. And it is very interesting that Job, the most righteous man that God had on this earth, in the end he says, "I repent in dust and ashes. I have previously heard of the Lord, but now I have seen Him."

In other words, Job was a righteous man, but God showed him Who righteousness is. I have to say although it does not say it this way, but what Job really saw was Jesus Christ, the righteousness of God. And when he compared that righteousness with his own, he fell down as one dead and said, "I repent in dust and ashes."

I think of David who was a man after God's heart. That is what the Word says about David. There is no doubt that he was a man after God's heart, but we also know that David sinned some serious sins, and he needed to repent. And we know that when we read the Psalms, we find how much his heart was crushed and his return to God.

The remnant, who had come back to build the house and restore it, and to build the wall and set up the house in Jerusalem, needed to repent as we will see today. Think about the church. What was the Word of the Lord in Revelation to His church? There were seven churches, and we know that the word to all seven churches was, "He that has an ear to hear, let him hear." But in five of the churches He called them to repent, and I think particularly of the church in Laodicea which represents the church age that we are currently living in. What was the key issue or the

key problem in Laodicea? It was lukewarmness. The Lord said, "You are neither hot nor cold, and I cannot stand it. I am going to spew you out of my mouth." What a tragedy for this last church age! I think we all realize that that is a critical issue in this day, and even in our own hearts. There are times when we sense that lukewarmness, and there is the need to repent.

Malachi's Message on Repentance

Today, you may not hear one word I have to say, but I want you to read the book on Malachi by Stephen Kaung. It is a tremendous book, and it really does apply to us today individually.

Interestingly enough, in Malachi's book his whole message is on repentance. 400 years before Jesus came the word was 'repent.' There was no other message until Jesus came, and when He came, the message from John the Baptist was, "Repent."

In Malachi we find the Lord's heart being poured out to His people. In a sense, he told the people what the issues were, but they did not see the issues. He challenged them because of their lack of love. They had grown insensitive to the love of God. He said, "Where is my honor?" There was a lack of respect for the Lord, and He challenged them on their lack of purity. They were serving out of duty and not out of love. He also challenged them on the issue of faithfulness. They had become weary of serving the Lord because to them it was a duty. It was not something out of love.

The Lord said, "Return unto me." He was almost begging these people to return to Him," and they said, "Do we really need to return? Where have we gone astray?"

He also challenged them on the issue of what was the priority in their lives. Was it the Lord and His interest or their own interest? As it turned out it was their interest that they were most interested in.

He challenged them on the issue of reverence and holding to the Lord. There was a lack of the fear of the Lord. And this fear of the Lord that God was talking about was fear of disappointing the Lord. That is really the Christian's fear—disappointing the Lord. It was not there. So I would encourage you to read the book. It is much better than anything I can say this morning.

As I said, 400 years earlier until the time of John the Baptist, the Lord spoke to the remnant in Israel. They think Malachi the prophet actually spoke during either the interim between Nehemiah's first and second return to Jerusalem or during his second return to Jerusalem. That was almost a 100 years after the initial return of the remnant to build the house of God. These were ones who had given themselves to the house of the Lord to restore the house, the sacrifices and the wall. The Lord had a burden, which came to Malachi, and that burden was, "Repent." The whole book is about repentance.

In Malachi 3:7 the Lord said, "Return unto me, and I will return unto you." These are the ones who had given themselves to the Lord, and yet they needed repentance. The Lord was saying, "You have drifted away from me; return unto me, and I will return unto you."

Brothers and sisters, they did not respond to the Lord, and God was silent for 400 years; He did not speak to them again. His love caused Him to send this message to them 400 years earlier.

He was quite frank with them, but they did not respond. That was God's love reaching out, but they did not, and He was silent.

Brothers and sisters, is the Lord silent in your life? Sometimes we may mistake His silence as everything is okay. I think that happened to Israel. But most likely it means there is an issue in our lives, and God is still waiting for a response to His last word to us—repent.

God knew their hearts; He knew that there was a lack of reality, a lack of life, a lack of fellowship with the Lord. I think it is interesting that in Malachi 3:1 he is speaking a message of repentance, and he speaks of John the Baptist. "He told his people, 'Behold, I will send a messenger (John the Baptist), and he shall prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant (the Lord Jesus) in whom you delight. Behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.'"

Verse 3:2 he says, "But who may abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiners fire and like a fuller's soap."

Verse 3:5 he says, "I will come unto you for judgment."

There is quite a difference in the people's reaction in the days of Malachi and in the days of John the Baptist. One of the problems that the people had as well as the scribes and Pharisees, who were the ones knowledgeable in the Word, was that from the Old Testament prophecies they only saw one event of the Lord's first and second coming. Although there are some references to the coming of the Lamb of God, they did not pick up on it. They saw the Messiah's coming to mean that His kingdom was going to be established right then, and that caused them some issues. But from the words of Malachi they knew that when the Messiah came, there would be judgment. This is what they were expecting. The Messiah would come, and His kingdom would be set up, but there would also be judgment at that time.

In fact in Joel 2:1-2 it says, "The day of the Lord is coming, the day of darkness and gloom, the day of clouds and blackness." You would think it would be a day of rejoicing, but here it says that it is a day of judgment.

The second thing was that from the prophecies they were expecting the establishment of the Messianic kingdom.

Isaiah 9:6-7: "For unto us a child is born, a son is given, and the government shall be on His shoulders. Of the increase of his government and peace, there shall be no end, and upon the throne of David and upon His kingdom He shall sit."

They were expecting the kingdom, the Messiah, but they knew also there would be judgment. What they did not understand, and even today there is misunderstanding in the church. God could not have His messianic kingdom, His earthly kingdom on this earth being governed and ruled by an unspiritual people, by a people of the flesh. He needed to have a spiritual people, a spiritual kingdom established in order to bring in His earthly kingdom. He could not afford to have His kingdom filled with people of the flesh and living under Jewish law. He wanted a people of faith, the just shall live by faith, and not ones who were just fulfilling the

Jewish law. The sins of the man and the sinner needed to be put away, and a new humanity brought in like His only Son. I think that explains so much.

Remember the story of Nicodemus and how he came to the Lord at night. Now Nicodemus was a Pharisee, and most of the Pharisees were legalistic. But it appears to me, and I think most scholars agree that Nicodemus, even though he came to the Lord at night because he did not want anybody to know that he was going to see Jesus, was really interested and had been drawn in some way to the Lord Jesus. Obviously, he had probably heard John the Baptist and sensed that he was not like the hard-shell Pharisees. More than likely, he may have been in the crowds listening to John the Baptist saying, "The kingdom of God is at hand." And as John was talking about the kingdom of God being at hand, the Lord Jesus showed up in the crowd. John pointed to the Lord Jesus and said, "Here He is. This is the Lamb of God who can take away the sin of the world."

So I believe that probably Nicodemus came with a good heart and a good spirit, but most likely being a good Pharisee, he probably felt he was in good shape, that probably he was going to make it into the kingdom. But he also knew about the judgment, and he was probably concerned: "Am I really ready? Is there something else I need? Maybe some adjustment?" But he never got to ask the Lord that question. As soon as he said, "Good teacher," the Lord responded and said, "Look, Nicodemus, in order to be ready for the kingdom, in order to enter the kingdom, you have to be born again." Of course, he had no idea what the Lord was talking about. Today, we do know what it means to be born again.

Brothers and sisters, the Lord Jesus needed a born-again people for the kingdom. He needed to obtain a people for His kingdom. That is why He came as the Lamb of God to be the sin-bearer of the people. He was the One through which the old man is put away and a new humanity comes in. I do not know if you realize that but when you accepted the Lord Jesus Christ, in God's eyes you were actually buried, you were put away, and yet you are risen in Christ, and that means a new humanity has come into your life. Now you can live off the old humanity if you want, but God calls us to live off this humanity that is available to us in Jesus Christ, who will be the ones to make up His kingdom.

400 Years After Malachi

However, after 400 years the people had not changed. When John the Baptist came on the scene, it was a sovereign move of God. There was no reason why the Lord should once again call them unto repentance. In other words, they had not done anything concerning repentance. Their hearts were not any better. In fact, they had even grown harder and worse, and yet the Lord out of His love and mercy called to them once again. After 400 years He spoke through John the Baptist, and the whole nation was awakened. That is the difference. There was a difference between the speaking of Malachi and John the Baptist. They were both joyful, but they were a little terrified. Their joy was because the Messiah was coming, and in their minds that meant He was going to set up His kingdom right then. He was going to overthrow the Roman government, and He would sit on the throne. He would rule over Israel and the nations, and they would be God's people, and everybody would have to come under the Jewish law and live under the Jewish religion. So in that sense they were joyful. But remember, that was their concept, and when the

Lord did not begin to meet that expectation, the crowds turned on the Lord and said, "Away with Him." It was because their expectations were wrong, and their expectations were not met.

But in a sense they were also terrified, and fear came upon them. They knew that if the kingdom was at hand, judgment was at hand, and they were fearful of that. So what was the difference between the movement then with John the Baptist and prior? There is a great difference; the Holy Spirit fell upon this people with the spirit of conviction, of sin, of righteousness and judgment which we find in the book of John. The work of the Holy Spirit is to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. I think that Spirit fell upon them because when the Pharisees came to John the Baptist, he looked at them and said, "You brood of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" They had been warned 400 years earlier, and now judgment was at hand. That is what they began to be awakened to; it was now, not in the future. There was not going to be a future judgment; it was right now. It was imminent, and they were scared. They were fearful because if they remembered Malachi's word, he said, "Who can stand at the judgment?"

This kind of reminded me of Jonah and Nineveh. You will remember that Jonah was sent out to be a prophet to a Gentile people, the Assyrians, who were the enemies of the Lord's people. They had destroyed the Northern kingdom of Israel, and eventually, Babylon took Judah. But the point is this that as far as I know this was the only Gentile nation that the Lord sent a prophet to—and He did. What was Jonah's message after God finally convinced him that he needed to give it? Jonah's message was, "In forty days, the Lord is going to overthrow Nineveh." That was his message. He did not even ask them to repent. He just said, "In forty days judgment is coming." They awoke, and they repented. Jonah did not even have to ask them to repent. They came under such conviction that they repented, and the Lord at that point did not destroy Nineveh. I think that is amazing! But that is the difference. The Lord began with Malachi to draw them with His love and mercy, but they did not respond, and now the kingdom of heaven was at hand and the Lord spoke to them of judgment, and the Holy Spirit convicted them. That was the difference.

I do want to say one thing in the defense of the ones that Malachi spoke to. It is really wonderful. Out of that remnant of people came another remnant, and this is what Malachi says in 3:16-17: "They that feared the Lord (remember I said it means fear of disappointing the Lord) spoke often to one another, and the Lord heard them, and wrote a book of remembrance concerning them that feared the Lord."

They loved the Lord, and they had a heart for the Lord. So there were some who responded to the Lord's message, but by far the majority did not, and they got worse.

When the Lord looked down upon those people 400 years later, He had to say, "They have not responded; they have not gotten any better, but I am going to move." And He sent the Holy Spirit with the power of conviction of sin and righteousness and judgment upon them. Thank the Lord; that was the Lord's mercy. Was that not the Lord's love? A lot of times we think the message of judgment is just for punishment, but it is God's mercy. It is God's love calling out to His people and even to the world. God moved, and the people cried out. The crowds came to him and their cry was, "What must we do?" And of course, John the Baptist said, "Be baptized with repentance." I guess this was the real point of all of this so far.

Brothers and sisters, it is God's grace that brings conviction to your heart. It is even God's grace by which you can repent once convicted. You know people can be convicted and not repent. The repentance of God is truly a work of God in your heart and life, a work of grace. So if conviction comes upon you, it is not something to run from, but something to embrace because it is the Lord's love reaching out to you. If we do not respond to love, we should be awakened because of judgment.

The Terror and the Love of God

In II Corinthians 5:11 Paul speaks of knowing the terror of the Lord, and in 5:14 he says, "The love of God constrains us." The love of God and the terror of God obviously do not seem to go together, nevertheless, they do. They are two sides of the same coin. The terror of the Lord convicts us, awakens us to our condition, awakens us to where we really stand with the Lord. And His love draws us to Himself. He becomes your way of salvation. So it is both the terror and the love of God in our lives.

Also, I want to make this point strongly. The Holy Spirit was convicting these people of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and they were fearful. They said, "What can we do, John?" I think it is so interesting that at that point it is Jesus who appears in their midst, the Son of God, the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world. Revival had taken place, and the key was the spirit of conviction of sin, righteousness and judgment that caused them to be awakened, and then the Lamb appeared. He is their answer; He is our answer.

I remember recently in Mac's sharing on the history of the church, in one of the messages he mentioned Johnathan Edwards and George Whitfield who were both used by the Lord as a voice that brought a great revival. It was called the Great Awakening in the colonies in the seventeen hundreds. It was a great awakening, and I am going to read excerpts from Johnathan Edwards' most famous sermon which was "Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God." He spoke of the impending judgment of hell waiting unbelievers, and the only way of salvation was through faith in Jesus Christ. In those days a lot of people thought it was by works that you were saved, and Johnathan Edwards corrected that, but he also emphasized this impending judgment. We would call them today "the hell fire and brimstone preachers." And this is some of what he said:

"The wrath of God burns against them, their damnation does not slumber. The pit is prepared, the fire is made ready, the furnace is hot, ready to receive them, the flames do now rage and glow, the pit has opened her mouth under them. The devil stands ready to fall upon them and seize them as his own. At what moment God shall permit him they belong to him. He has their souls in his possession and under His domain. Experience shows that there is no evidence that a man is not on the very brink of eternity, and the next step will not be into another world. Unconverted men walk over the pit of hell on a rotten covering. They are black clouds of God's wrath hanging over their heads. God's vengeance has been withheld, but your guilt in the meantime is continually increasing."

He also mentions that everyone was ready to slip into hell, and there were some eye witnesses' accounts of this message that during his sermon he had to stop numerous times because the people were crying out, and wailing, and there was great moaning among them.

Some were clinging to the columns in order not to slip into hell, so great was the spirit of conviction upon them. It was because they saw their nearness to hell.

When I came along I had heard a little of this hell fire and brimstone preaching, and it is really the love of God that we are here today. But I do say that there needs to be a balance. We do need to know that there is judgment; there is a wrath of God. We see it all through the book of Revelation. In the end those who are not drawn to Him and cleansed by Him will be cleansed through judgment. And when we go into eternity there will be no more sin, no more unrighteousness, no more self-life. Isn't that amazing! All because of the Lord's love and His judgment.

I think sometimes we need to see the depths of the darkness of what we are and who we are as sinners. I know that Watchman Nee and Jessie Penn-Lewis talk of the dark night of the soul. These were Christians far advanced in spiritual life, and there came a point when that darkness was so great that they thought they had lost their salvation. Of course, we do not lose our salvation, but how much more we appreciate the Lord's sacrifice on our behalf when we know what we have been delivered from—the great darkness that we have been delivered from.

I can give you my personal account as a child of twelve years old. I thought I was okay with the Lord even though I did not know much about the Lord. Occasionally, we would go to a Protestant Church, but that was only once in a while. I spent a summer with a young man whose grandmother was a Baptist, and she was all the time trying to lead me to the Lord. I did not know at the time that was what she was doing. But what really brought me to the Lord was that my mother came to me and she said, "Jerry, if you do not get your life straight with the Lord, you are going to hell." Now that woke me up. I knew my mom was dead serious. She was not just trying to quote me some Scripture; she was dead serious, and I knew it. The Lord convicted me, and I fell on my knees and asked the Lord for forgiveness. I did not even know at the time, that was when I was saved. I did not know what had happened, but the Lord met me there that day as a young man. And it was all because of the fear of judgment.

So I want to say that this matter of judgment is not a bad thing; it is of the Lord. If the Lord has been convicting you of anything in your life, pray that He will give you a real spirit of repentance. I have been praying that lately: "Lord, I just want Your Spirit of repentance. I cannot work it up, I do not intend to work it up, but I want to be aware I need to be clearer with You and before You." I believe if you do that Jesus will come in and say, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

John's message of conviction of sin, righteousness and judgment fell upon the people. John was there, but Jesus also was there in their midst, and we know that Jesus is greater than John, and He is the One who can save us from sin and judgment. He is the Lamb of God who was in their midst, and John announced it. John baptized with water for repentance of sin. In other words, these people were coming to John and saying, "I am a sinner. I need God's salvation." Jesus was there as the Savior, and John the Baptist pointed them to Him. Even though they had been baptized with the water of repentance, he said that this is the One, Jesus, who can baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Baptizes with the Holy Spirit

And we know what that means. Being baptized with the Holy Spirit has a couple of results. One of which is that Jesus comes into your heart, into your spirit. That happens when the Lord Jesus baptizes us, and the Holy Spirit enters into us, and He is with us. We also know that the Holy Spirit can come upon us as an outward anointing for service, for serving the Lord. I think all of us have experienced that to some extent. You get into a situation, maybe sharing a message, going to help someone out, taking them a meal, or whatever it may be. You are tired and worn out and you say, "I do not know if I have the energy to fix this meal and take it, but the Lord quickens you and you are able to do it. It is in the simple things, but the Lord's anointing was there, the One greater than John.

But the anointing also means something else. It means when you enter into the Lord Jesus Christ, the old creation, the old man, the incapable man is put away and a new man comes into your heart, and that is Jesus. It is the new humanity that comes into your heart by which you live. That is what being baptized with the Holy Spirit means, and also you are baptized into the body of Christ. You are now part of the family; you are joined with your brothers and sisters through the Holy Spirit in one spirit.

When Jesus came to John to be baptized, John obviously sensed something about the Lord. He knew about Him being the Son of God, and he said, "I cannot baptize You. You need to baptize me." And he was right, but the Lord said, "We need to fulfill all righteousness," and Jesus was baptized by John. I need to be very clear here. Jesus was not baptized because He was a sinner. We know that. He was sinless, the perfect Lamb of God. He was baptized because we are sinners. Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist was His commitment to go to the cross, His commitment to carry out the plan of salvation, His commitment to deliver us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of His love. And when He was baptized, the anointing came upon our Lord Jesus to carry out that mission of going to Calvary's cross and defeating the enemy. And we know because it says that the Spirit came upon Him like a dove, and the Father sealed it by speaking from heaven, "This is my Son in whom I am well pleased."

Brothers and sisters, you have been anointed whether you realize it or not, and you have been sealed because the Father looks upon His Son. He does not see what you were; He sees what you are in Christ. The Father spoke to the Son. The basis of the Lord carrying out His mission to save mankind was based on His relationship to the Father. The Lord said this: "I only do what the Father tells me to do. I only say what the Lord tells me to say. Whatever the Father wills, that is My will.

I remember one time when He was speaking to the woman at the well. He had sent the disciples away to get food because they were all hungry at that point, even Jesus. He was tired and weary, but He took time to speak to this woman at the well who desperately needed Him. But the point is that when they came back, they were astonished, and they said, "Lord, we have brought some food, and the Lord said, "That is not my food. My food is to do the will of the Father." I would have to say brothers and sisters, our becoming the voice, our preparing the way of the Lord depends on our relationship to Him. Do we do what He asks us to do? Do we say what

He tells us to say? Do we do His will? Do we respond to His will? When He says, "This is my will," do we agree with Him? It is all based on relationship.

Then we know that Jesus went to Calvary's cross, and He ascended back to the throne. But when He ascended to the throne, He was anointed once again. The Holy Spirit was poured out upon His head, and it says that it went down to the skirts of His garments. That is the church: 120 individual believers, operating as independent before the Lord, all of a sudden they became the body of Jesus Christ on the earth. What a transition for these people!

I was reminded of something I read this morning. The first miracle after Jesus arose from the dead was when the disciples, Peter and John, went to the lame man, who was begging on the temple steps. Peter said, "I do not have silver or gold, but what I have I give to you. Arise and walk." In other words, we no longer depend upon our terrible weakened condition; we depend on the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what that miracle is about. We are incapable, but He is capable.

The Judgment of God

The love of God constrains us, but the terror of the Lord reminds us that at His return there will be judgment, and we will have to give an account. Unbelievers will give an account at the Great White Throne Judgment. They will be judged on the matter of eternal life or eternal death. May I say this much. I do not know if anybody here is an unbeliever, but when you die, it is not over. It is eternal death; it goes on for eternity. It does not mean you are going to be unconscious. It means you will be alive but dead in the deadness of your sin. Brothers and sisters, it is a terrible death; it is eternal death. But in Christ Jesus there is eternal life.

I Peter 4:17 says that the judgment will first begin at the house of God. Before the Great White Judgment there will be a judgment on God's house.

II Corinthians 5:10-11: "We must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ that each receive the things done in the body."

In Luke 19 we find the parable of the pound or the parable of the mina, as it is called in some versions, and the parable of the talents in Matthew 25. The parable of the mina or the pound is really the grace of God which has been given to all of us. We all have been given grace, great grace. We have grace to do the will of God. We have also been given spiritual gifts. You may not know what your gift is, but if you respond to the Lord that gift will come out. We have been given these two things by the Lord Jesus Christ, and in both of those parables the nobleman goes away to receive a kingdom, which is what our Lord is doing now. He has gone away to receive His kingdom, and when He comes back He will call all of His servants to account. He will say, "I need you to give account. I have given you grace, I have given you spiritual gifts. I told you to go and exercise these gifts that there might be increase in your life personally and in the lives of others. In the story He rewarded those who had gained increase, but the one who had the pound or grace said, "I just put mine in a napkin and kept it until you came back. I did not really use it at all." The other one in the parable of the talents said, "I buried it, and now here it is." There was no gain. The Lord said that all that is not done according to His will is wood, hay and stubble. In the last days there will be that consuming fire at His judgment, and all that is not of Christ will be burned up. What remains is the silver and gold that has come out in exercising the grace that

God has given. To the one who buried it or hid it or kept it and there was no increase, He said, "There will be great weeping and gnashing of teeth. What does that mean? There are different interpretations, but it does not mean they have gone to hell. It means that they will be in great regret, but they cannot repent at that point.

During the millennium period I always say the Lord is going to put them through remedial school to bring them back up to the level they should have been at spiritually; so it is really the Lord's love and mercy. However, to the ones who have been faithful and fearful of displeasing the Lord, who have honored the Lord, and loved the Lord, He said, "Good and faithful, servant, enter the joy of the Lord. That is what we want to hear at the judgment seat of Christ, but we all need to know that there is a judgment seat coming, and the Lord is concerned about our lives and we will give an account.

The Last Word

So does the Lord have a word for us today, not only us but the whole world? Does He have a message? I think He does, and I think it is repentance. There have been many warning signs that He has been giving the world for quite a long time. We have seen it in this corona virus which shut the world down for two years. It affected the whole world, not just America. I think it is a sign. In America we had 9-11, but we did not wake up. We have had tremendous hurricanes, storms, and tornados, and we still have not awakened. The world has not awakened. Russia is now invading Ukraine, crushing them, evil intent with no real purpose except to gain power. Lawlessness is exploding. Is this not a wake-up call? You know when the Lord brought judgment upon the world with the flood, it says, "They were full of lawlessness and violence," the key indicators. We are experiencing that today in the United States. I think there is a call, a wake-up to the world. We hope the world does awaken. Judgment is at the door, and the wrath of God will follow.

For the church, even those that are responding to the Lord, I do think He wants us to have a repentant spirit, not to hang our heads down and walk around saying, "Lord, I repent." We used to see these people with the signs, "God's judgment is at hand." They were dressed in old clothes and they looked ragged. That is not what the Lord is looking for. He is looking for us to raise our heads and say, "Lord, I need You; I need to return to You in this last hour."

The Lord says, "I rebuke and discipline as many as I love. Be zealous and repent." That is the Lord's word to us in this last hour. Brothers and sisters, the last church age is Laodicea. Their issue, the thing that God called them to repent of was being lukewarm. And that is a danger for all of us in becoming lukewarm. So may the Lord encourage us. I do pray that His Spirit of conviction will come upon us, the Spirit of repentance for His sake, not just for our sake.

Lord, we come to You today, and I just shared this word. I do pray in this last hour that You are calling us to be Your voice to prepare the way. Lord, that word is repent; that word is to return unto You, and You will return to us. Lord, I do not speak this to condemn anyone, but just to encourage us all that out of Your great love You do discipline us, You do correct us. You do it in mercy when we get to going in the wrong way. You do Your best to draw us back, but really it is because of the Holy Spirit laying hold of us showing us what we are missing and bringing us back

to Your love. So we just lift our hearts up to You today. Lord, only You can search our hearts. Only You can know our hearts. That is not our job; that is the Holy Spirit's job. Lord, we put ourselves into Your hand. In Jesus' name. Amen.