

“And this Gospel,” shall be preached...”

Matthew 24:14

Sermon Summaries from Ministers of the Worldwide Church of God

Climb Every Mountain, Conquer Every Trial

One of the most famous law enforcement officials who ever lived made the following statement: “Through many years of active life and the observation of many kinds of people, I have found that the strongest, the wisest, the most competent and most reliable man is also the first to admit his inadequacy.

“Contradictory though it may sound,” he continued, “he is strong because he is humble, and he remembers always that man is the creation of God. No rule of life is more basic. When man leans on his own understanding, when he lives by his own strength, when he boasts of probing the mysteries of the atom, the depths of the sea or the secrets of outer space, he forgets God and he claims he’s his own master. The result is untold suffering.

“Even though one’s position is maintained, even though material wealth increases, success quickly turns to failure when God has been forgotten. There is no peace of mind. There is no personal satisfaction. There is no personal experience of inward joy. ‘To trust in the Lord with all thine heart’ is the mark of strength and it is the only path to happiness, success and to true fulfillment.”

Strength in weakness

I was very moved by that short article. Those words sound to me like the words of a man who has experienced a great deal in life, who has seen success, failure, people who boasted of strength but were weak and people who perhaps appeared weak, but, in his estimation, were strong.

The apostle Paul wrote very much the same thing. In II Corinthians 12:10 Paul had been going through a personal trauma, perhaps for some time, and had asked God three times to remove it. But God wasn’t going to do it (at least not right then). So Christ told Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

And Paul responded, “I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

“For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong” (II Corinthians 12:9-10, scriptures paraphrased throughout).

You know, as an individual I feel very weak. Many times in some of the greatest traumas I have felt the most inadequate, unqualified, most incompetent and weakest. And yet, looking back in retrospect at some of those experiences, perhaps they were met with greater strength than when I felt cocksure, positive, self-confident and overly assured. We need to acknowledge that our strength is in our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, not in ourselves.

Awareness of God’s power

What is the greatest need around the world in God’s Church today? Money? More tithes and offerings? More Church members, more ministers? Rather than these, the greatest need is a reliant strength, a strength that can only come from a living faith that God is on His throne, that Jesus Christ is at His right hand, that the universe is being sustained by that great power of God’s Spirit that moved across the face of the deep, as the Bible says in Genesis 1:3:

“And God said, Let there be light; and there was light.” It’s the same Spirit that joins with our human spirit and witnesses before God that we are sons of God, as Paul wrote in Romans 8:16.

Isn’t that really the greatest need for us today? To have a much deeper, abiding, personally committed realization of our own inadequacies, hopelessness, humanness and lack of faith, strength, hope, courage

and the fruits of that Spirit? But why? So that we can have a living, deep, constant awareness of the power of the living God who strengthens us.

There are several reasons why we go to church on the Sabbath. Naturally we go to be informed, to be inspired, to hear preaching so we may understand a little more deeply what God requires of us as members of His team. But we’re also there to meet that God.

Look at Isaiah 45:5-6: “I am the Lord and there is no other, besides me there is no God: I gird you, though you do not know me, that men may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me: I am the Lord, and there is no other.”

God says, “I’m the Creator. I made the universe. I keep it going. Now if you have imagined I’m a different kind of God than that, or if you’ve created other gods in your mind, those aren’t God. I, and I alone am God.” Verse 22: “For I am God, and there is no other.”

Moses said in Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” That’s our God.

Hebrews 1:2: “But in these last days he [God] has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.” The same God, who made the world, who sustains the universe, who gave His Son, also deals with us — today.

Our God is great. Our God is majestic. He’s powerful. He’s living, conscious, intelligent. He looks upon us, observes us and knows us, and knows His Church and its needs.

The greatness of God

One of the mind’s eye scenarios I like to think about is in Revelation 4. I don’t know just how much of this is literal and how much is symbolic. But I like to envision it exactly like it says. There are beings in heaven who bow before God unceasingly because of His greatness and His majesty.

Their principal purpose seems merely to worship with that ceremony all the time. So when we pray, I suggest it might be good to mentally picture this vivid view of the greatness of God just as John saw it when he was taken in vision into the very presence of God.

John was told, “Come up hither.” Then immediately it was like he had become a spirit and he saw a throne in heaven. “And he who sat there appeared like jasper and carnelian, and round the throne was a rainbow that looked like an emerald.” An emerald is a very beautiful stone. Can you imagine a rainbow caused by refraction from an emerald?

“Round the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clad in white garments, with golden crowns upon their heads. From the throne issue flashes of lightning and voices and peals of thunder, and before the throne burn seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God; and before the throne there is as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.

“And round the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures. And they say, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!’” Perhaps these four creatures do this only at ceremonious times, at certain ritual times, I don’t

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know. But John saw it, and he explained what was going on.

Angels are servants

You know something? God isn’t principally concerned about angels. He’s concerned about the seed of Abraham (Hebrews 2:5-8, 16). He hasn’t called angels to be His sons.

He has made angels to be servants of those sons. Great as angels may be (Hebrews 1:14), His concern for us is greater than His concern for angels. And these beings undoubtedly realize that the ones Jesus will receive to Himself when He returns to earth are then going to be greater than they. Yet they worship God, standing in awe of His capacity to make more beings just like they are worshipping.

I find that is almost overwhelming to realize. When I go in the name of Jesus Christ, my Savior and High Priest, before God and say, “Father, in the name of Christ, I talk to you as my Father, the One who loves me and deals with me in mercy,” it is that God to whom these beings are saying day and night, “Holy, holy, holy.” And it is that God before whom we come on this Sabbath day to worship.

Psalm 93: “The Lord reigns; he is robed in majesty. The Lord is robed, he is girded with strength. Yes, the world is established by his strength; it shall never be moved; your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting. . . . Your decrees are very sure; holiness befits your house, O Lord, for evermore.”

Now, brethren, we, the Church of God, all the people that constitute the Body of Jesus Christ, we are that house of God. We have been called that several times in the New Testament. (See I Timothy 3:5, 15; Ephesians 1:18-23, 2:13-14, 19.)

When you read “holiness befits thy house,” is that your prayer? Is that your effort? Do we reverence and worship God? Do we serve God with all of our hearts?

We’re told in I John 2:3-5: “And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says ‘I know him,’ and disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected.”

David loved God’s law

God meant what He said, that we are to have no other gods before Him, that we should not take His name in vain, that we should not bow down before other gods and idols, that we should reverence Him and keep His Sabbath day. Why the Sabbath? Because we need it, to remind us of Him, that God is our Creator — and Creator of all things.

We can’t honor God unless we honor our parents, and we can’t say that we know God and at the same time have so much contempt before Him that we commit adultery and kill and steal and cheat and covet. To us, like David, that beautiful Law must be the most cherished blessing. How he rejoiced in the law of God, such a beautiful “lamp to his feet!” (Psalms 119:105). He read it, meditated on it, thought about it, because that law revealed to him the nature, character and love of God.

In the law of God David saw God Himself. Therefore he knew God. Mistakes he made — he made plenty. But he could and did repent because he knew and loved the law (Psalms 119:97, 113, 127).

Mountains and valleys

I think David’s 23rd Psalm reveals a man who knew what it was to look from one mountain peak of human emotion to the next, and also what it was like to have to grope and crawl through intervening valleys below.

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Every Mountain

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I think I've experienced that to some degree. You walk along on the crest of a mountain and it seems there is just nothing you can't meet, no problem is too big. Everything is just beautiful and life looks fantastic. And then, suddenly, crash, you're down in the depths of a valley. David was down in the depths when he said, "I walk through the valley of the shadow of death" (verse 4).

Do you know what I think David probably did in those instances? Because David used the word "remember" so often when he wrote his songs or psalms, I think it was because he was remembering the mountain peak before that valley. And as he reflectively looked back up to that peak, he realized there was a next mountain peak and he knew God was there. He came strolling out of that valley and went right back up on the crest again, with the strength of God — only later to crash back down in another valley!

That's the way life is. So therefore the Bible says: Remember. Remember the good things. Remember the days when it all went well. When you come into the land, God told Israel, remember what it was to come through the desert. Remember what it was to go through the trials because when you have all the good things, it's easy to forget the bad ones. And when you have the bad ones, realize there are going to be some better days, and while you are in the good days, grow in your strength so God will see you through every valley and you can rise back up again to the next peak.

Why trials and tests

David was a son of God. He prayed in Psalm 51 that God would not take His Holy Spirit from him. He had God's Spirit. The New Testament tells how Christians are all sons (and daughters) of God as well. And like David, we are all being tested. The time of trial is upon us (I Peter 4:17).

U.S. News and World Report printed the following

quote in 1968 from Sen. Frank Carlson of Kansas: "the world today is looking for men. It's looking for men who are not for sale, men who are honest, sound from center to circumference, true to the hearer's core; men with consciences as steady as the needle to the pole; men who will stand for the right if the heavens totter and the earth reels; men who can tell the truth and look the world right in the eye; men who neither brag nor run; men who neither flag nor flinch; men who have courage without shouting it; men in whom the courage of everlasting life runs still, runs deep and strong; men who know their message and tell it; men who know their place and fill it; men who know their business and attend to it . . ."

God needs that kind of people. That's why he tests us. God is giving us a chance to unite in a common cause as Frank Carlson said. He wants people who can help one another succeed, people who will love one another, who will pray for one another; men who will go to one another in love and esteem. That takes effort on our part to pass these tests.

I Corinthians 10:1-6, 11: "I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same supernatural food [it's all an analogy of the experience Israel passed through]; and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness." They got their eyes off of God and they saw the around, and the problems, the trials, the thirst and the hunger, all of which caused them to be lost by the wayside.

"Now these things are warnings for us, not to desire evil as they did." And then he goes on to mention their idolatry, their fornication, their grumbling, their tempting Christ — it is a warning for us.

We can fall away and be lost. But what is God's promise if we follow His way? "I will never fail you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

Jesus suffered everything there was to suffer. And

He said, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Jesus Christ led captivity captive when He ascended upon high. He says that in Ephesians 4:7-8. He led captivity captive and He gave gifts unto men, to help us follow His lead. There has never been a temptation too big or too great that He can't help overcome.

Walking by faith

II Corinthians 5:7 clearly says, "For we walk by faith, not by sight." God will guide our steps, if we walk in believing faith. But walk in faith even when you don't see or know. But you walk anyhow, you go anyhow. That's living faith, active belief in the power, the reality, the majesty and the greatness of the real God in heaven, busy with His work in sustaining the universe, doing the things that God does.

Exodus 14 is one of the most outstanding examples of this. When Israel came to the Red Sea they saw the water, they saw the desert, they saw the dust cloud, which was raised by the chariots, horsemen and foot soldiers of Pharaoh, but they didn't see God and so they feared.

They saw the water and they thought they were trapped. And Moses had to say, "You're missing something. Stand firm, and see — he used the word *see* — "see the salvation of the Lord." And they saw one of the most fantastic miracles that has ever been worked.

Read the entire Psalm 46 for a sense of what they had failed to see.

Every one of us has stood at the fork in the road; we all know the two roads in Matthew 7:13-14. One is broad and easy and one is tough and difficult. You stand at that fork one day and you have to decide which way to go. Do you go on the easy road? Or the tough one? With God's Spirit we must choose and travel the rough, the difficult, the tough road.

God enables us to sing the song that is Psalm 91. It begins: "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty . . ." You read or sing the rest.