

Welcome everyone! The name of God's Church is COG-PKG - Preparing for the Kingdom of God. So today's title for the sermon is *Prepare Yourself!*

The purpose of this sermon is to admonish us to prepare ourselves spiritually for the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ, both during the time that is now ahead of us, the time called "the great tribulation" in the Bible, as in the time that follows after that, the 1,000-year reign, the Millennium. As we all know, Jesus Christ came the first time to be slaughtered as a lamb for the sake of all humanity. But the second time he will return as a lion, to bring to mankind with Godly power the way of life that will finally lead to peace and justice, something mankind has had to do without over the past 6,000 years, something man has never been able to attain to with its manmade governments that were all geared toward power, corruption, selfishness, injustice and oppression.

God has left mankind to its own ways, with its own systems, and their own thoughts about how government should work. But it has all come to nothing! Just look around you in the world. There isn't one country that is truly at peace. There is strife, conflict, and injustice everywhere. If you look at today's world and at the world in times past, you will see that mankind has failed in everything it does. There's total chaos, and the Bible calls this condition "Babylon," which means "confusion." And confusion is all around us. Just look at all the different religions that exist. Many of these religions came about from former split-offs from another religion because they thought differently about certain doctrines and disagreed.

Traditional Christianity, the Muslim religion, all are divided and all are still fighting each other amongst themselves. Since the Apostasy, the Worldwide Church of God alone has produced more than 500 split-offs! So both, the worldly governments and the worldly religions, suffer from complete and utter confusion.

And so we have to now prepare ourselves for the transition from this current system, from this confusion, to a system based on all that is from God, a system that is based on "giving" rather than "taking," a system that is not based on competition, but rather on cooperation.

Let's turn to **Isaiah 40 verses 3 to 5**. There we can read the words that John the Baptist quoted when he started out on his commission of announcing the first coming of Christ. **Isaiah 40 verse 3—The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert, a highway for our God."**

Verse 4—“Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight, and the rough places smooth.” Verse 5— “The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see *it* together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

These verses speak of Jesus Christ’s second coming, the time that is now at hand, the time that we need to prepare ourselves for. We must follow the guidance of our Father. He does His works in us, and we must submit ourselves to this process, so that He can accomplish these works in us because we surrender to Him. Then we can become that creation that he has planned for us.

John the Baptist didn’t just say “repent,” but he also said “the Kingdom is near.” But first of all Jesus Christ had to sacrifice himself to make that Kingdom composed of Godly individuals a reality, and then, after that Kingdom of a 144,000 would be completed, he could return to earth. For the past 2,000 years, Jesus Christ and God the Father have both looked forward to that moment in time when all that are part of the 144,000, all that God has worked with, will be alive again in the 1st resurrection.

The 2nd coming of Jesus Christ is at hand, as we all know. The announcement of his 2nd coming, the “cry” that is described in Matthew 25, where it says, “go out to meet the bridegroom,” resounded 21 years and a couple of months ago. This happened 21 years ago now. It took place on December 17th of 1994 in Atlanta, Georgia. Mr. Joseph Tkach sr., the head of God’s Church at the time, gave a sermon wherein he renounced the Law. This was the “Abomination of Desolation” mentioned in Matthew 24:15. Mr. Tkach said that the Sabbath was no longer required on the 7th day of the week, but that God could be served and worshipped on any day of the week. That was the announcement of the coming of Jesus Christ...the cry went out. And now we’re there. We know that this will now take place on Pentecost of 2019.

The time period of great tribulation that we are currently in is a time period that is no picnic. Especially as we proceed into this period. We are being encouraged, and this encouragement can only come from God. We must ask God to help us face this time period without fear.

I want to show you a number of characteristics that can encourage us. These are aspects of life that can help us nip fear in the bud. Because there will be fear in the world when things finally erupt. People will not know what hit them in that time that is still ahead of us. But we know what’s ahead, and therefore, we can prepare for it. If we develop these Godly characteristics in ourselves with God’s help, we will be strong and we will persevere. Then we will be able to handle everything that may happen to us.

Let’s look at some of these Godly traits, traits that Paul speaks of in **Galatians 5:22 and 23**. They are the “Fruits of the spirit.” **Galatians 5:22— But the fruit of the Spirit is love.** Godly love, a love that only God’s people in the Church of God can develop in them, with the help of His spirit. **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.**

By the power of His spirit God can develop His love in us, if we submit ourselves to this process and ask for it daily. If we ask this in our daily prayers, He will do this in us; you don't have to doubt that! We must develop Godly love for each other in the body, with God's help. Please turn to **I John 4:7 to 21**. There we can read in **verse 7— Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God**. God gives love. God is the one that gives love. Of and by ourselves we cannot produce love; it has to be given to us. **Verse 8— He who does not love does not know God, for God is love**. Now that is plain language!

Verse 9 -In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Because of Jesus Christ's sacrifice, God's sacrifice for us, we can see that love. When you sacrifice your own life for the sake of all of mankind...that is love. But the same is true about sacrificing your own son. And that is exactly what God the Father did for us. Through that sacrifice, God and Christ can actually live "in" us, and thus they can perform their works in us, to perfect us. There are other scriptures that state that if you don't have love, there is nothing left to live for. Without love, physical life amounts to nothing, let alone eternal life.

Verse 10— In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. God has loved us from before we were born. He has loved us when we were still cut off from Him, when we didn't know Him, when we didn't even know of Him. He already loved us, when we were still fully immersed in this world of competition, full of hatred and a loveless way of living. God loved us, even from before we were ever called, before God even started calling us by revealing His truth to us. The Bible says that we were enemies of God at that time. But God loved us, and He loves us now. That is awesome to know brethren! Everything, the whole creation, exists because Jesus Christ was prepared and willing to die for us. He also died for us so we could be atoned to God. And also for the very thing we are discussing today, to prepare us for the gruesome end-time events that are now before us. The Bible calls it "the great tribulation." God will protect us, and maybe, if it is needful for our character building...we will suffer to some extent. If that happens, you must remember that God does everything out of love for us. He does everything to mold and fashion us to His will, so we can perfectly fit into His Temple, exactly where He wants us to be. God's people have always been persecuted, but only because God allowed it so, and only because He has had a great purpose with it.

Verse 11— Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. This goes without saying. If we submit ourselves to Him, He can give us this love, a love that will make us strong, no matter what situation we find ourselves in.

Verse 12— No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. As Jesus Christ said: "He who has seen me, has seen the Father." If

we live according to what is stated here in verse 12, people around us in the world will be able to see that we are different...different from this world.

Verse 13— By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. If we submit to God and allow Him to work in us with His love, then we know that the relationship we already have with Him will only get better and better. We know that He is working in us, when we find peace in ourselves. God's way of life gives us peace of mind and happiness, most importantly love for each other in God's Church, and also towards the world around us.

Verse 14— And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. We acknowledge and know through our calling, that God has sacrificed Jesus Christ to redeem us, the *true* Jesus Christ that is. The world doesn't know the true Christ. They have another Christ than we do. We must be a testimony, by showing that we are different. We don't celebrate the pagan holydays; we don't cling to pagan customs as the world does. No, we keep God's Sabbaths and Holy Days. God sets us apart. He sanctifies us.

Verse 15 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. "Testifying Christ" means to live your life as he did, when Jesus Christ was here on earth. It's not a matter of just saying the words "he is the son of God." No! We must show forth through our conduct that we represent him and that we follow him, and that can only be accomplished if we allow God's spirit to work in us.

Verse 16— And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. We have experienced through our faith, what the love of God can mean to us. We must continuously ask in prayer for God's spirit to remain in us, and for His love to abide in us.

Verses 17 and 18— Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. When love has been perfected in us we can look forward to the day of our judgment with confidence and without fear (regardless of which resurrection we have part in). That love must first be perfected in us. And as Christ did, we too, must live our lives in this world.

Verse 18 again. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We should not be afraid! We don't have to be afraid for that time that is now upon us, if only we allow God's love to develop in us. There is no room for fear in the midst of love. On the contrary, perfect love omits fear. And if one still has fear, then they do not know perfect love, then they are not yet perfected in love.

Verse 19— We love Him because He first loved us. He loved us first, before we were born, before we came to life. Before all of that, God had already determined that He would sacrifice His son for us.

In **John 3:16** it states (you don't have to turn there, I'll read it to you): **For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.** God is love. He alone can give us love. And we must ask of Him in prayer to give us that love, for of and by ourselves we can do nothing.

Continuing in **1 John, Verse 20— If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?** We must work on self, and not hold anything against anyone in God's Church. And that isn't always easy. The longer you know someone, the more you will see things in them and experience things with them...and these are not always nice things...and those things can make it so that you start loving your brother in the Church a little less. We must work at this, and ask God for His help to forgive others as He does, when something like that happens. We must grow towards each other because we will need each other very much in the time before us. There is no room for strife or discord. If we are preparing for those things that are just ahead of us, we must also work on our relationships and make sure they are solid. There is no room for resentment against no one!

Verse 21— And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God *must* love his brother also. We must totally surrender ourselves with all our being to our Father and His son, our eldest brother, Jesus Christ. Because what he did is unbelievable and hard to grasp. We've just concluded the "Year of Dedication," but that dedication does not stop. No, it continues, and we must submit ourselves ever more so that we can remain dedicated. We must also stop and consider the sacrifice that was made on our behalf, for each and everyone of us personally. We must learn from this love and dedication that Jesus had, and fight against self and against that selfish human nature that is in all of us. We are still very much carnal, and we will remain so till the day we die. But we must strive to remove sin from our lives and to make way for God's way of life in us. And Jesus has set us the perfect example.

Let's turn to **Romans 8:35.** Whatever it is that we will face in this time we have now entered into, we can always be confident that we will get help, whatever circumstances may occur. **Verse 35— Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?** No one and nothing! No one can separate us from Christ and his Father who both live in us. ***Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*** Whatever crosses our path, nothing can separate us from the love of God. If we think on that at times like these, and ask for help, then we will not fear and we won't feel anguish. For God will give us the strength we need, when we need it. And also sin, "nakedness," cannot separate us from Him, because that is exactly what Christ died for. Our sins can be forgiven, and then we can move on with good courage.

Verse 36 and 37. As it is written: “For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. We must repent on a daily basis, and continue to think differently and to walk differently. If we do that, we can be assured that we will overcome.

Verse 38 and 39— For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Nothing in the whole of creation can keep us from the love that comes from God our Father, the love that our Father gave us in and through His son Jesus Christ.

The book of Psalms is a good help and guide for us. If at times we don't know what to pray about or talk about with God, when you read any chapter in Psalms, the subjects and thoughts come into your mind more easily, and then we can talk to God about these things in prayer.

To better prepare us for the tribulation that will only get stronger with the passing of time, I turned to the book of Psalms. As we just read in Romans, nothing can separate us from God. His love will help us to go forward even in times of tribulation. David knew tribulation in his life, for he had many enemies. Saul persecuted him more than once. David is truly a beautiful example for all of us. He regularly stumbled and fell into Satan's pitfalls, just as we do. But there was something he always did. He always repented. He always went before God and admitted his faults and repented from the heart. He certainly wasn't a man that threw in the towel, when he had gone against God's commandments, guidance and God's way of life for the umpteenth time. No! He would go before God's throne time and time again to ask of God to be granted to continue. He knew that he could trust on God. He knew that God would be faithful to help him and save him from any situation he got himself into. Maybe that help didn't always come in the way he would have preferred it to come...but rather in the way God intended it.

God has the same goal for all of us, and that is for each and every one of us to be born into His Divine Family. And in order to be able to enter into that divine Family, we must experience things in our physical lives in order to strengthen our faith, so we can truly stand in our faith. It isn't always pleasant, and it can hurt, but as it states in the Bible, “Our thoughts are not His (God's) thoughts.” God's goal is to prepare us for His Family. If, therefore, we prepare ourselves for those things that are recorded in the Bible, if we prepare for those things that are upon us, we must ask for His spirit daily. Because His spirit can strengthen us, and it can also make us stronger and make us “stand” in the face of every obstacle we come across on our path.

Let's turn to **Psalms** now. **Psalms 18 verse 1—** I will love You, O Lord my strength. In order to be able to love God with His agape, we need His help. Only He can live in us through His spirit, and make it so that we love Him. And then we can truly say from the heart: **I will love You, O Lord.** If

God is working in us, and only if we open ourselves up for that. Those of us that were part of the Worldwide Church of God back in the day know that there used to be some speculation about certain things. We often talked about the “place of safety.” We thought that we would all move to Petra in Jordan, once the tribulation would commence, where we would wait in peace and safety until the tribulation was over. But nothing was further removed from the truth than that. We didn’t yet understand what we know now!

Verse 2— The Lord is my rock...God is our rock! And he is not only our physical protection, but more importantly, He is our spiritual protection, **and my fortress and my deliverer.** He has saved us and redeemed us from eternal death, **My God, my strength, in whom I will trust.** In Him we can find refuge. In His fortress, His high tower. With Him we are safe and able to withstand all attacks that we suffer from the outside, from the world. Jesus Christ is always our savior; every moment in our life that we sin, He is our redeemer, thanks to his sacrifice. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Be open and honest before God, and He will help you in your time of need.

On in **verse 2— My shield**, think of the armor that Paul talks about, the faith that is actively working in us so we can withstand the attacks from Satan, his fiery darts that he aims at us every day of our lives, **and the horn of my salvation**, our redemption, our salvation. We are currently working at our own redemption from this mortal physical body, with the help of Gods spirit...**my stronghold.** In other words, I may come and be with You, so that I can live in safety and security. We live “in” Him and He lives in us. God and Jesus Christ live in us, as we all know.

Verse 3— I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; So shall I be saved from my enemies. We have been delivered from Satan through the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, God can live in us.

Verse 4— The pangs of death surrounded me, and the floods of ungodliness made me afraid. When we were not yet called, when we were still engaged in the habits and customs of this world, we were dead, and Satan and his demons had power over us.

Verse 5— The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. When we were still immersed in sin, and slowly but surely were nearing our death, we were called and we were baptized and received they laying on of hands, and consequently, we received Gods spirit in us. And from that point forward we could move towards an undefiled life, towards eternal life, prepared for us by our God.

Verse 6— In my distress I called upon the Lord, And cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, And my cry came before Him, even to His ears. We can come before God every minute of the day, to ask Him for help, no matter what happens in our life. Sometimes you are at your wits end, you can see no way out, because of certain things happening in you life, things you can’t control, things you sometimes can’t even put your finger on, that is the time you need to ask God to

help you. God will hear your cry for help, and He shall surely come to your aid. You can rest assured of that!

Verse 7— There are truly gruesome times ahead of us, but we know that that time will pass away. **Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken, because He was angry.** The governments of this world won't know what hit them, and they will tremble. But regardless, they will not respond in a positive way to the "two witnesses" that will then be performing their job, commissioned to them by God. God will carry out His judgment, and He will do so out of love for His creation. It is the only way mankind can be made to listen and can be made humble. It has to happen. If this would not take place, mankind would continue to resist their Creator that gave them life. Man will not listen to God, and therefore, God will turn the earth upside down so that they will begin to listen.

Continuing in **verse 8**— **Smoke went up from His nostrils, and devouring fire from His mouth; coals were kindled by it.** It will all come to pass. Prepare yourself, because we need to be prepared in order to be strong during this time, to be able to withstand all things that we will witness during that time. There will be troubles on earth in many places; war will set the earth on fire. Millions of people will die, and it won't be a pretty picture. It will be gruesome. But we can find shelter with God, and we can always ask Him for help to go on. And we are blessed to know that once the 3 and ½ years + 50 days are over, there will be better times! So we need to prepare ourselves for those things that will come to pass, but also for the time beyond— the Millennium. We are ultimately preparing for God's Kingdom, God's Family; that is our ultimate goal. And that is why the Church carries the name, Church of God - Preparing for the Kingdom of God.

Let's turn to **Psalms 31** and read some verses there. Here we can see that God helps, and that we can always take shelter with Him in hard times. We'll return to chapter 18 shortly, but we'll first read **Psalms 31, verse 1**— **In You, O Lord, I have taken refuge.** We take refuge in Him, and we never come before Him in vain. We can always come before Him. He always opens the door when we knock, so we can come into Him. And when we ourselves open up to Him, and repent, God will remain in us. Gods says to Church of Laodicea in the book of Revelation, **Behold I stand at the door and knock and if anyone hears My voice I will come into him and dine with him.** This is all spiritual. We need His food daily in order to overcome. **Let me never be ashamed; in Your righteousness deliver me.** Ask God for help. Ask Him to help you flee spiritual temptation in this world, and to be led by His spirit, by His righteousness, and receive the necessary chastening that comes with that.

Verses 2 and 3— **Bow down Your ear to me, deliver me speedily; Hear my voice, save me from this wicked world around me. Be my rock of refuge, A fortress of defense to save me For You are my rock and my fortress;** God is our rock, our Petra, our tower, our stronghold, in Him we can find

peace and guidance. **Therefore, for Your name's sake, Lead me and guide me.** In Your name You will lead me and feed me in Your Church. That is where we receive the food and guidance that we need to become strong and well prepared for the return of Jesus Christ.

Verse 4— Pull me out of the net which they have secretly laid for me. God has pulled our feet out of the net, the snare that Satan has laid for us. He is the One that woke us up, and led us to His one and only true Church, where we found refuge in the truth and in our fellowship. That is where we become spiritually strong! **For You are my strength.** With you I can take shelter, within Your walls, I am safe. We find peace and God's love in His Church. Every week we receive more strength and encouragement, to prepare us, and to ready us for that time that is now ahead of us.

We must trust in Him. **Verse 5— Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.** We must surrender to Him completely, and submit ourselves totally. For that is exactly what Jesus Christ did. This scripture contains the exact words that Jesus spoke before he died on the stake. If we surrender to God completely, if we submit ourselves to Him completely, if we put ourselves completely into His hands, then Almighty God will save us and deliver us from our sinful physical body by bringing us into His Family.

The time ahead of us will not be easy, but at such times when things are dire, God will be there to support us. He loves us, and through His love we can cope with all things that come our way.

Verse 6— I have hated those who regard useless idols; but I trust in the Lord. If we trust in God, we will automatically lose interest in all such things, the useless things that the world clings to and values so much. Then we will discard all the unimportant, worldly, idle customs and materialistic things of the world, things that the world has made to be their idols, because we have found an eternal treasure with God.

Verse 7— I will be glad and rejoice in Your mercy, it says here that we must rejoice in the goodness and the love that God has shown each and everyone of us. **For You have considered my trouble; You have known my soul in adversities.** God sees the battles that go on inside of us. He sees our wretched state, our carnal human nature. He can see the sins that we commit, of which we have to repent every single day. He can also see the tension caused in our lives by always having to get up again and move forward again, and to never give up. And during the great tribulation we will not be free of sin, we will sin for as long as we live. But God, in His infinite mercy, helps us, and He forgives us our sins, time and time again.

Verse 8— And have not shut me up into the hand of the enemy; you have set my feet in a wide place. In our inner struggle with our wretched state, and in our fight against sin, God sustains us and does not allow Satan to get the better of us. God helps us to “stand,” and He helps us in our battle against our adversary. God's spirit will guide us through that time that is now ahead of us, as long as we stay close to Him and submit ourselves to Him, because if we do so, nothing can separate us from

Him and our elder brother Jesus Christ.

Verse 9— Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am in trouble; my eye wastes away with grief, yes, my soul and my body! If we experience difficulty in our battle against sin and with the time that is just ahead...we must know that God is with us and He will not forsake us. He will help us with His mercy and His Godly love.

Verse 11— For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away. David fought an intense battle within himself. His inner struggle and the iniquity that he saw within himself caused him to spiritually “see” himself waste away. But he knew one thing and clung to it; he knew that God would forgive him and give him the strength to continue in repentance and in his life.

I'd like to turn to **Psalms 18** now. We just read **verses 7 and 8**. Let's first read those verses again. **Psalms 18, verses 7 and 8— Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken, because He was angry. Smoke went up from His nostrils, and devouring fire from His mouth; coals were kindled by it.** There will be tribulation, and it needs to come about, because otherwise, mankind would never want to listen to it's Creator and submit itself to Him. He will bring all of it about out of love. And we must prepare ourselves for that time, because we need to become much stronger, so we can withstand all the things that we will witness then. We must be spiritually prepared. We started that process during the “Year of Dedication.” Because when we are dedicated to God, and stay real close to Him, we will be able to come through this time, and we will be able to focus on the Millennium that follows right behind it. We are preparing for God's Kingdom, for God's Family...whenever that will become a reality for us individually. Whether you are part of the 144,000 or not, is not important, as long as we all may attain to that goal in the end.

Now we'll read on in **verses 9 to 15**. **He bowed the heavens also, and came down with darkness under His feet. And He rode upon a cherub, and flew; He flew upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness His secret place; His canopy around Him was dark waters and thick clouds of the skies. From the brightness before Him, His thick clouds passed with hailstones and coals of fire. The Lord thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered His voice, hailstones and coals of fire. He sent out His arrows and scattered the foe, lightnings in abundance, and He vanquished them. Then the channels of the sea were seen, the foundations of the world were uncovered at Your rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of Your nostrils.**

God will make everything come to pass exactly the way He has planned it. It will be a time of trouble, but all that God does, He does out of great love. Love for mankind. Because the great tribulation is truly the only way to bring mankind to their knees, to bring man the point that they will finally listen. There is no other way; there is no other means.

Our experience over the last couple of years of sending out the books proves that. Not many people

have responded, that much is clear. But we, all of us who are in God's Church now, we do want to listen to our Father, and we do want to prepare ourselves. Do ask God for help in your prayers, and ask of Him also to show you more of His purpose for you. Ask for His guidance in your life, because that is what we will need more of. That's a sure thing. It will be a time like never before has been nor will be again; that's what it says. Mr. Armstrong talked about this and warned for this all his life, and now it is upon us. It's at the door. It's about to happen.

Verse 16— He sent from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters. God is our rock. He and our elder brother, Jesus Christ. God protects us. **Verse 17— He delivered me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me, for they were too strong for me.** He protects us against the attacks from Satan, and from people around us that are hostile towards us and hate us for what we believe.

Verse 18— They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the Lord was my support. They can only persecute us to the extent that God allows them to. Our Father loves us, and He only allows things to happen to us in order to build us up...to make us fit perfectly as stones in His spiritual temple. **Verse 19— He also brought me out into a broad place; He delivered me because He delighted in me.** God will save us from the woes that lie before us now. He loves us and is concerned about us. We need to be readied. We must prepare ourselves, and repent and examine self on a daily basis. We must also learn to control our thoughts because that is where it all begins. That is where sin originates—in our mind, in our human spirit. But we have access to His throne. We can go past the veil. We have God's spirit living and dwelling in us, and that enables us to conquer the enemy, the "adversary."

Again, that time is right in front of us now, and it will result in World War III. But one thing is certain, we in God's Church can see there's light at the end of the tunnel. We can see there is a solution to all of this. We know what lies beyond that time of trouble: the return of Christ and the beginning of the Millennium. That is what lies behind the tribulation that must come to pass in this world, in God's plan. To be granted to know that is a great comfort to us, and it gives us encouragement to go on and to focus on God more than ever before. We must build each other up and encourage one another. We must love each other with God's help, and as long as we are still able to come together, we must strive for unity and oneness.

As long as we still have this ability to gather together on the Sabbath(s), we must do so every Sabbath. And of course, I'm addressing those amongst us that have the ability to do so. Over here in our congregation, that is not a problem for most people. But I understand that there are other local situations where this may not be easy. But nevertheless, we must all strive to attend Sabbath services as often as we can in order to fully observe and sanctify that day. Because the Sabbath day is what sets us apart every week again. The Sabbath is the day that separates us from those in the world. And we so need each other! We so need to encourage each other and we need to prepare ourselves together for what lies ahead.

Let's turn to **I Thessalonians 2:17** now. Paul tells us how important it is that we meet up and have active love for each other, amongst ourselves! **But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart**, in other words, we didn't meet physically, but in our heart we were always with you, and we have tried hard to meet up again, **endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire**. In those days, God's Church was already being persecuted and oppressed, and it was (made) difficult to meet up.

A couple of verses back, in **verse 14** we read: **For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus**. God's Church has always been persecuted. And that won't be any different in the time that is upon us. People don't want to hear the message that was written down in the books by Ron. They hate it. And that has always been the case...**you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they *did* from the Judeans**.

Verse 15— who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men. Both the prophets and Jesus Christ were persecuted by them, and were killed by them. They are opposed to God and to all His people.

Verse 16— forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up *the measure of their sins*. They tried to silence them; they tried to stop them from preaching the gospel. And today that is no different. Man still doesn't want to hear God's message about His coming Kingdom, **but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost**. There will come a time that God will deal with them, and will confront them with their deeds. That will be during the period of time of the Great White Throne, when they will be judged.

Verse 17— But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. We too must long to see each other with great longing, and meet up. Especially now, while we still can.

Verse 18— Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us. We can read here that Satan, the great adversary and seducer, hates mankind intensely, and he was the reason why Paul could not visit with the Church of the Thessalonians. And today it's no different for us because he now tries to hinder God's prophet. He tries to silence him by imprisoning him. He knows that he has but a short time left, and he does everything within his power to accomplish just that. God allowed Ron to be put in prison, but Satan did not achieve his goal of silencing him with this move. Because during that period that Ron was imprisoned, God provided us with an abundance of spiritual food. And even after his massive heart attack, Ron was given the opportunity to write his final book. And the weekly sermons have been awesomely inspiring and profound. Satan did not succeed in hindering that. During the Philadelphia era Satan also tried to silence God's apostle. He tried this by shutting down Ambassador College in Pasadena in January of 1979. But it didn't work.

Verse 19— For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? Who is it that gives us hope and joy, and what is our reward? Paul says to the Church: “You are! (It needs to stop here like it is a period.) When we shall all stand together in the presence of Jesus Christ.” **Verse 20— For you are our glory and joy. “Indeed,” Paul says, “our glory and our joy, the crowning glory of our work...are you!”**

With God’s love in us, and with our love for one another, we can boldly face everything that awaits us. But we must work at it. We must fight and ask for His help every day, to build up that love in us, and to make that love stand out in our daily life.

God will protect us during that time that lies in front of us. He will enable His people to enter into the Millennium. He will lead them into the Promised Land, into the “World of Tomorrow” as Mr. Armstrong used to call it. And if He intends for any of us to be a witness during that time of tribulation, if we are persecuted, then so be it. Because we’ll receive the strength we will need to face such persecution. With God’s love, His spirit, and His help we can be strengthened to endure such things.

Matthew 16:24. Let’s turn to **Matthew 16** and read **verses 24 to 26.** **Verse 24— Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself.** If anyone wants to follow me, they must be willing to deny themselves, and not put themselves first, but be humble, **and take up his stake, and follow Me.** And you must be prepared to face the consequences; you must be prepared to suffer for it, physically and spiritually. You may be persecuted for what you believe, for the truth you hold to. You can be imprisoned or even tortured. That is what has been happening to God’s people over time. The Catholic Church has done unspeakable things during the time of the “inquisition.” Everyone they could lay their hands on that didn’t follow them, by for example not keeping Sunday (which is called “the sign of the Beast”), was tortured and killed in gruesome ways. Just look it up in any kind of encyclopedia. And God’s Church was persecuted most of all. Satan made sure it was. He wanted to erase her, because he knew (and knows) that they are God’s people, the people that He (God) works with. But God has stated that “the gates of hell would never prevail over His Church.”

Some among us have experienced this at first hand, when we had to flee the Worldwide Church of God. Because that was a time when the Church was being persecuted from within. And God protected His Church during a time period of 3 and ½ years. Spiritually protected that is, in the spiritual desert that existed after the Apostasy. During that period of time, God preserved a remnant. God’s Church has always been persecuted, but has always survived. Many things may happen to us, also on a spiritual plane. We can be mocked and ridiculed. But always remember this: God is with you, God is in you and He will never forsake you!

Verse 25— For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. This verse speaks for itself. If you are prepared to sacrifice your life because you want to hold on to the truth (and the way of life that is automatically tied to that), and if you don't give up and don't forsake all that you have learned, and if you let God the Father and Jesus Christ do their works in you, then we are told by Jesus Christ himself that he will give you life...eternal life!

Verse 26— For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? What good is it if you could afford anything in this world, if you could buy anything and do anything there is to do, or if the whole world belonged to you? What could be more precious than your life, your spiritual life, your eternal spiritual life in Gods Family, in the Household of God? What could possibly be more valuable than that? That is what Jesus Christ is asking each and every one of us. It is written, and I'm paraphrasing this: "All you can see around you, is only temporary. But the things we cannot see are eternal. There is nothing in this world that can separate us from the love of Christ."

We've read this earlier, but I'd like to read it again. You don't have to turn there. **Romans 8 verse 35. Verse 35— Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?**

It is possible that God wants for some of us to be a witness and to testify. There's one good example in the Bible of such a witness, such a testimony. You can find it in **Acts 7 verses 1 to 50**. There you can read what Stephen told the Jews, and how he lectured them. He gave a strong and inspired account of how God's people had fared in the past. I won't read the full account. Maybe it's something you could do on your own at home. It's a truly inspiring story. But for now, I will read the last few verses. **Verse 51— *You* stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so *do* you.** When we were called, we were presented with the choice to obey and follow God, or to continue in our ways, opposing Him. Because truly we also resisted God spirit, unknowingly at that, but we did so and we weren't any better than the Jews of that time. And the same is true about the world around us.

Verse 52— Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers. It's always been like this, to this day. God's prophet has also been persecuted and imprisoned. Ron also preaches that the "Just One" (Jesus Christ) will come a second time. He will at that time return to establish God's Kingdom on earth. And Mr. Armstrong also spoke about and announced the second coming of Christ. He traveled to meet many world leaders, to personally tell them about the gospel. And all this was done in a joint effort with the support of all the members of God's Church. And the world still rejects it all. So as far as that is concerned...nothing has changed.

Verse 53— Who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept *it*. As we all know, to the Jews the law was strictly physical. But Jesus thought that the law should be kept

spiritually. And today we can see that the law, the 10 Commandments that God gave to man, is still trampled under foot.

Verses 54 to 60— When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with *their* teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast *him* out of the city and stoned *him*. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep. God was with Stephen. He helped him and gave him His Holy spirit. He showed him His Glory. Of course we don’t know what he saw exactly, but it must have been fantastic and quite powerful what he saw. It gave him the strength he needed to endure being stoned, both spiritually and physically, before he finally died.

And so, in this end-time, it is possible that some of us will have to testify, and will be killed for that testimony. Today’s world really isn’t any different from the world back then. On the contrary, the world has only become worse, more ungodly and more corrupt.

Chapter 8, verses 1-3— At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen *to his burial*, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison. Paul was still called Saul at that time; he hadn’t been converted yet. In other Bible translations it says that Saul was in **hearty agreement with** Stephen’s death. From that day forward a terrible persecution came upon the Church. And it’s possible that as we draw closer to the return of Jesus Christ during this end-time, persecution may befall the Church of God once again. Saul was convinced that he was doing a service to God, that he was doing the right thing. And the same may be true about those that persecute the Church today. Therefore we should not “charge them” with it. However difficult that may prove to be. Because as long as God has not given them His spirit, as long as their eyes have not been opened, they cannot see what they are doing.

And that was the case with Saul, who was literally made to be blind for 3 full days. It’s maybe good to read some of the verses that mention how God forced Saul to pay attention to Him. **Acts 9, verses 1 to 8—** Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Then the Lord *said* to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought *him* into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

And then we read how that Saul was called and brought to conversion, and how he was baptized by Ananias, and received the laying on of hands to receive Gods spirit. And the Lord said to Ananias that Saul also had to suffer because of Jesus Christ’s name. We can read this in the following verses. Verses 15 to 18— But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.” And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

And later on his name was changed to Paul, and he started preaching the gospel with great fervor. And we can read then that he also was persecuted and suffered many hardships as we just read in verse 16.

2 Corinthians 11, verses 23 to 27— Are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool. I *am* more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; *in* journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness (says darkness). They even thought Paul to be dead after the stoning we just read about. And in another scripture it is mentioned how they carried him out of the city and cast him there and left him for dead.

No matter what situation we find ourselves in, God will be with us and will carry us through. Whatever may happen to you. He is our Rock and our High Tower. With Him, we can find shelter. With Him, we can find the strength to endure these trials and to give testimony of whatever God wants us to testify about. And don’t forget that it is the things that we experience in life that mold and fashion us. And that doesn’t always happen the way we would want it. God does all this out of love for His creation. We are molded and fashioned until we can finally be born into His Family until we can finally be placed in His temple as living stones. No matter whether you are part of the 144,000 or

whether you are added to His Family at another moment in time. Whether you are added at the end of the Millennium or at the end of the 2nd resurrection (the 100 years). God has a place in His Family for all that want to follow His way, for all that want to obey His laws, for all that submit to being molded and fashioned by Him.

We who are now part of the Church of God have the opportunity of not having to live in this “flesh” for a 2nd time, to not have to be in a 2nd resurrection to physical life. And that’s a great blessing. God has called us, and He has awakened those that have come out of the Worldwide Church of God in order to prepare us. For us the “day of salvation” is now. We are being judged now. That is why we must fight our “self” now. We need to keep on changing with God’s help, because He and Jesus Christ live in us and do their works in us, as we have heard many a time before. And again, if some of us are to testify during that time ahead of us, then we will be given the strength to do so.

It’s the same as it was in the days of Ephesus and all the era’s thereafter. Those of us that are part of Gods Church now can be used by God to testify, to become a testimony. And God’s spirit will help us to deliver that testimony, to establish that witness. As Christ said: “The Father does the works in me, of myself I can do nothing.”

Let’s turn to **Matthew 10** now. We’ll read **verses 16 to 22. Matthew 10, verse 16— Behold I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.** The world around us is one big spiritual wilderness, with all its false religions and customs. And the scattered church has also become a spiritual wilderness. God’s spirit is not in it. They hate us. They hate the truth. They hate God without even knowing it themselves. They think they’re doing God a service by persecuting us and by gossiping about the Church. In another verse it states that as vultures they pick at the Body, Gods Church - PKG. But also the world around us will not be happy when they will come to see that the books that are published by us contain the truth, that everything that is written in those books is right. We find ourselves truly amidst wolves, and we must indeed be careful, yet honest, because we should never forsake or deny the truth we received from God.

Verse 17— But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You must stand up for the truth whenever you are seized and treated cruelly. **Verse 18 — You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.** Jesus says that this can happen to you. And then you will have to give testimony before worldly religious leaders and to the gentiles, the heathen. You will then have to give testimony to unbelievers that resist God and His representatives on earth - Gods Church.

Verse 19 and 20— But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. God will give it to us when the time has come for us to testify.

Jesus Christ's life was one continuous testimony of who he was, where he came from, who his Father was who begat him, of what the purpose and the reasons were of why he had to be born, first as our savior, and then later to return as King to establish the government of God.

We'll return to Matthew shortly, so please keep you spot here, but we'll turn quickly to **John 10**. There Jesus testifies about who he is. **John 10, verses 24 and 25— Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, “How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.” Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me.”** The Jews wanted to know whether he was the Messiah. And he said: “Yes I am. The works that my Father does in me testify to this.”

And in **verse 26 and 27** we read: **But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.** And it's the same today. Those who are scattered by the apostasy don't believe. Only those awakened by God, or called by Him into his only true Church hear His voice and believe. And we can show the world through our conduct, through our way of life, that we are Gods people. Doing so we give testimony of God, and testimony that Christ is working in and with us. We need work at this with God's help and through His guidance in our daily lives. We must pray to be able to show forth to the world around us that we are different. We don't work on the day they call Saturday. We keep God's Holy Days. Our speech is different. We are friendly and show that we are different to others around us. Then the works that God the Father does in us are a testimony to the world around us that we are His.

Lets return to **Matthew 10**. We just read in verse 18 that you can be brought before worldly leaders to give testimony of what you believe. And in **verse 19** we read: **But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak.** We shouldn't be worried about what we should say or how we should say it.

Verse 20— For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. At that time God will give you the words to speak into your mind, through His spirit. He will speak through you to those leaders, or to anyone else in this world. The words will come to you, and they will hear what they will need to hear. For God knows what they will need to hear at that time.

21— Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. This is what happened on a spiritual plane after the Apostasy. We had no more contact with our family, but neither did we have any more contact with Gods family, the Church, in our congregations. We were, so to speak, dead to them. The bond that we formerly had was broken. Before that, we had been in unity of teachings and beliefs, but when that bond was broken they turned their back on us.

Jesus continues in **verse 22. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.** You will be hated. It happened. All the people we knew started hating us, and the same is true about those who left in recent times. They no longer have the love that can only come from God as we heard about earlier during this sermon. The love would “wax cold,” and that is exactly what happened. But Christ says: “Endure! Endure until the end! Don't give up and you will receive life in all eternity.” What could be more beautiful than that? To endure means to continue on the narrow path that you have started walking on ever since you were called. It means to go on repenting every day, and to continue living God's way of life. It also means being concerned with and actively involved in the Church and the brethren, to help where you can, and to not forsake praying for one another.

So, in order to prepare ourselves for that time that is now right ahead of us, we've been looking at one of the many Godly traits - love. Love is one of the fruits of God's spirit. And it is the first one to be mentioned in **Galatians 5:22.** There it says, **But the fruit of the Spirit is love...** The 2nd fruit of the spirit mentioned there is **Joy.** Let's have a look at how we can use these traits in our daily lives. Because joy will also help us to be stronger during this time in the end-time that is called “the great tribulation.” The fact that we have understanding concerning God's plan and God's truth, should give us great joy. What we are able to see is so amazing, so incredible. The world around us doesn't know it; it doesn't “see” it. But we, who are called, are no longer in darkness, as the world with her false religions still is.

Let's turn to **1st Thessalonians 1,** where Paul talks about the joy we can have because God has chosen and called us, to start living according to the truth that He has shown us that we can now understand. **1 Thessalonians 1, verses 2 and 3— We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father.** Paul is thanking God for the effect that his preaching has had on the Thessalonians. He says that they are practicing their faith with love and labor. They are enduring. They are persevering, and they keep their hope and faith focused upon their savior. The Father sees this, and it is He who gives the help to stand fast in the faith, to persevere in the works that are being performed in us, and to never give up but to go on!

Verse 4— Knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. They are the called-out ones, and Paul says to them (and us) that the leadership of God's Church knows these things because of the fruits they could see in the congregation. And the same applies to us today; we must also produce fruit that shows forth that we are God's, that we are different from the world around us.

For in **verse 5** we can read: **For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.** James says, “Don't be hearers but the doers of the law.” The Holy Spirit did its work

when the gospel was preached to them. This caused them to also put into practice what they had heard. They knew that what Paul was preaching was the truth. They were fully convinced of that because God's spirit inspired them so.

Verse 6— And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit. You have all started following us. You have become imitators of us. You have put the things you've heard into practice. Despite the tribulations and the great difficulties this way of life causes us while we live in such a hostile environment, we can still do all these things with great joy as Paul says. Because we know why we do it all. We know that God is working in us. And the Holy spirit gives us this joy, because of our selves we cannot work it up. God must give us that joy for His incredible plan for mankind. We can have joy when we see the works being performed in each other by God. We can rejoice in our unity. There are so many things that we can see because of God's truth that can make us happy. When I go over the 57 Truths again, and meditate on them, I realize how much we have been given, and that makes me happy. And then I thank God for making it possible for me to see and understand this all. There is no division, because we all believe the same thing. It wasn't always so. I've witnessed different circumstances and they were not happy times...but truly sad times.

We must prepare ourselves for the things ahead, and we can do that by asking God for help every day. We must ask Him to help us so His plan can be performed in us the way He chooses to. Over the past few years we have been provided with many sermons and postings that have shown us more clearly what God expects from us. God is preparing most people in His Church now to live on into the Millennium, together with those from the scattered churches that will still be drawn back, and all those that will respond to His calling once World War III becomes a fact.

And if it be God's will for some of us, to give testimony and perhaps suffer death because of it...then so be it. God knows what is best for each and everyone of us. We have the truth, and no one can take that from us. You must cherish the truth. Keep going forward, and ask for His help not to be fearful. Because I do believe that of ourselves we would be afraid when we will see those things happen around us. "In love there is no fear" is what we read earlier. Only God can take that fear away from us. If we stay close to God we will make it to the finish line. If we stay close to Him we will finish the race successfully.

I want to finish up this sermon by reading from **Colossians 1 verses 3 to 14**. Please turn with me to **Colossians 1, starting in verse 3— We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as *it has* also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as *it is* also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.**

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.