***The Nature of the Church

Colossians 1:24-29

COL-190***

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We continue our study of Colossians 1:24-29, "The Mystery of the Church," segment number 5.

The apostle Paul, in Colossians 1:24, writes: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh, I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's affliction." In this verse, the apostle Paul expresses his great personal joy for the sufferings which he has experienced in bringing the gospel and doctrine to the Colossian Christians. Even as he wrote this letter, he was suffering imprisonment in Rome for his Christian witnessing. The Colossian believers were themselves saddened by the reports of Paul's trials. But he himself considered those worth the spiritual victories which were achieved by the Colossians.

We Christians today are inspired by Paul's example in suffering, which we experience as well, in proclaiming God's truth of gospel and doctrine. Satan's world hates the Lord Jesus and His church-age saints who expose the evil of the world's ways. But we dedicated Christians rejoice in the positive volition of some (young people, and older folks) who respond to the Word of God.

**The Church has not Replaced Israel**

Paul's suffering as a Christian witness were, in part, experienced in his physical body. He suffered in his body in behalf of the body of Christ, which he said is the church. The church is the special body of believers called out from Jews and gentiles for a unique relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to His bride for all eternity. The church is an organism, a living body, begun on Pentecost, and will end on the day of the rapture. The age (or dispensation) of the church interrupts the dispensation of Israel under the Mosaic Law. There is no church in the Old Testament.

The church has not replaced Israel in God's plan of the ages. The church is not the continuation and current expression of Israel under Judaism. The elements of Judaism under the Mosaic Law have not been incorporated by God into the manner of life of Christianity. Therefore, we Christians, in the age of grace, do not have altars. We do not have priests as access to God, through whom we approach God. We do not have certain holy days. We do not have a Sabbath day. We do not have special feast days. We do not perform animal sacrifices. We do not operate on the principle of tithing in our giving. We do not separate between clean and unclean foods. We do not have priestly robes in the pulpit, and we do not follow rituals of worship. All of those things, while sometimes incorporated into the Christian church, are alien to the church age, and they've been brought over by people who do not understand the difference between Israel and the church. Israel and the church continue into eternity as separate entities with distinctive divine programs. They never merge anywhere along the line, not even the eternity. Israel goes on forever as Israel. The church goes on forever as the church.

That's no small thing. It's very important that you understand that. It is also very important that you realize that most Christians, even biblical Christians, do not understand that distinction. They completely miss the boat on that issue. That's why the Bible is a balled-up jumble to them. And they bring in things that are alien to the grace of the church from the legalistic age of Moses in the Old Testament.

After the rapture of the church, which is the next event in prophecy, our meeting in the air with the Lord Jesus Christ – living and dead Christians taken to be with Him into heaven, the final seven years of God's plan for Israel, which have never been fulfilled, will be completed, and they will end in the Second Coming of Christ to the earth. Failure to separate God's programs for Israel and the church results in the loss of an understanding of the superior grace privileges, freedoms, and Holy Spirit power blessings of the church age saints. Christians under legalisms are pathetic do-gooders – workers, trying to gain God's favor by rules they keep. It is a pathetic thing not to understand what it means to have doctrine in your human spirit, and the power of God the Holy Spirit – free, because you are in fellowship with Him, to take that doctrine, to guide your life.

Just imagine what a wonderful life that is. You never make a foolish decision. You never move in a stupid direction. You never have an emotional outrage – a regurgitation from the sin nature. You never have any misdirection of your life, because your mind is the mind of Christ. That's a great thing: to be able to think like God; to be able to have feelings like God about any issue; and, to be able to make the decisions of God. But a Christian who has doctrine in the sphere, because he has been extensively taught, and who is open to do the hard thing and the good thing, and who is not resistant – the power of the Spirit of God will lead you through that doctrine to do what is right. And you will live a significant life.

Why would anybody want to go back to the Mosaic system? Why would anybody want to try to squeeze the marvelous, magnificent grace life into the legalistic life of the Mosaic code? The body of Christ, the church, is not Israel, nor the inheritor of Israel's promises and covenants. Israel is now on hold. It's alive and well. It is there in God's plan. But God has held it up before its final seven years of the divine plan are fulfilled. That's all. Israel is in abeyance. And now God is drawing out, the Scripture says, "A people for Christ's name" – a special people with great privileges, and great powers, and great relationships to the person of Jesus Christ for all eternity. This is a terrific and wonderful era of time.

Yes, it's true: people living now, who are left behind at the rapture, but who have contact, or have been given information about salvation, are going to rue the day they didn't believe, because: yes, they can believe in the tribulation; yes, they will be saved, and they will go to heaven, but they're not going to be part of this marvelous entity called the church, the body of Christ. They're all back on Old Testament ground with all those limitations.

Now, the failure to separate Israel and the church in God's plan of the ages is clearly evident in Christian denominations today. It is a very sad thing to observe. The religious leaders of the Reformation cleared up a lot of misconceptions from Roman Catholic doctrine in the medieval church. But one of the things they never got straight was to distinguish between Israel and the church in God's plan of the ages. They did not distinguish between the fact that Israel was one plan of God; and, the church was another plan of God. Israel had a beginning in time. Israel had a program. Israel has an end in the book of the Revelation. The church had a beginning at a point in time; it has a special program; and, it has an end in eternity. They go on separate tracks all the way through. The reformers just didn't get it. They didn't live long enough to get that one figured out.

So, the consequence is that they followed Roman Catholic theology. And Roman Catholic theology taught them that the church had replaced Israel in the plan of God. Roman Catholic theology said that when the Jews rejected Jesus Christ on that Palm Sunday, that final rejection, which was the day that the clock stopped ticking on Jewish history, to the very day, with seven years left to go unfulfilled, which will be the tribulation – that day, they made their official statement of rejecting Jesus Christ, Roman Catholics say that that finished them, and God raised the church to replace Israel. No, it put them on hold, but it did not replace them.

So, many Christian denominations today incorporate the alien elements of Judaism into Christianity and the grace way of life. Paul says, "The church, His body" – that is what he serves. That is for which he suffers. That is the victories that he achieves. Denominations incorporating alien elements of Judaism into Christianity, and the grace way of life, what does that result in? Spiritual orientation and empty formalism? You talk about dead orthodoxy. Any group which does not distinguish Israel from the church, I guarantee you that they'll have dead orthodoxy. You will come into a church service. You will go through boring, distressful ritual. The priest will say something, and you will answer. The pastor will respond, and you will answer. And you will go through a form in hymnbook. And then you will have a little homily; a little bit of encouragement – sweetness and light will be preached; you will light a candle or two; sniff a little incense; and, go home – that you have worshiped God. It's formalism. And after a few Sundays, that gets to be a drag. Why is that? It's because you cannot mix the legalistic system of Israel with the free grace system of the church.

So, clearly, this is a very serious error that has come down to our day. I saw this recently demonstrated in a Lutheran church in Norway. Lutheranism is the state religion of Norway. The church that I was in had an altar, before which the pastor stood for some kind of Old Testament, priestly-like ministrations. At a certain point, he would come out, and he would stand before this magnificent altar, while the congregation was singing. I presumed he was praying. I'm not sure what he was doing. He would have to be very careful not to wander and forget what he was supposed to do. But he just stood there. But that was a very high point of the meeting. Things began with the priest before the altar.

**An Altar**

Now, the biblical purpose of an altar is for performing sacrifices, which in the Old Testament, portray the future sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as the final Lamb of God for the sin of all mankind. An altar is for sacrificing.

One of my Lutheran relatives one time asked me: why we don't have an altar here in our church? I started to tell him, "Well, it gets in the way of our skating and our basketball playing." But I said, instead, "Why do you have an altar?" And he thought a moment and said, "Well, for sacrifices." And I said, "What are you sacrificing? The great sacrifice for the sins of the world is Jesus Christ, and it has been made on the cross. Why do we need an altar now? What are we sacrificing?" That puzzled him? His final remark was, "Every time I talk with you, you make me feel like everything I've ever believed is wrong." And he was right about that – mostly.

The final sacrifice of Jesus Christ has been made. So, an altar in the church age is obsolete, and an insult to the propitiation provided by Jesus Christ – the satisfaction for sin that He has provided. You go to an altar to get satisfaction for your sin – for God to cover your sin. The animal slain symbolized that Christ was going to pay for that sin. So, for the time being, you got some grace on credit from God, so that He would give you another chance.

**Once for All**

Notice a few Scriptures. Romans 6:10 – this is no small thing: this failure to distinguish between Israel and the church. The pure waters of the grace of Christianity are contaminated by the pollution of Judaism. Romans 6:10: "For the death that He died (Christ), He died to sin, once for all. But the life that He lives, He lives to God. How many times does Jesus Christ have to die? How many times does He have to be sacrificed? He did that on the cross once for all. Ergo, we don't need altars anymore. We have no purpose for them.

The book of Hebrews is very explicit about this in Hebrews 7:26-27: "For it was fitting that we should have such a High Priest (that is, Jesus): holy; innocent; undefiled; separated from sinners; and, exalted above the heavens, Who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself." He offered up himself once for all. "Once for all" does not mean until He does it again – until it needs to be done again. You do not sacrifice Him again. Once for all – and that's the end of the need for the altar.

In the Old Testament, the priest had to come to the altar before he could minister in the holy of holies, on the annual Day of Atonement, when sin was covered for the whole nation of Israel. He had to make offerings for himself. Then he went on the basis of that temporary grace covering of the animal sacrifice in his behalf, so that he could minister before the mercy seat in the holy of holies, and sprinkle the blood for the people for the next year, for their recovery under the future forgiveness of Christ. But the Lord Jesus Christ did not have to offer any covering for Himself. He was sinless. He didn't have to have any propitiation – forgiveness for his sins.

Furthermore, the priests in the Old Testament never could sit down. But Jesus Christ did it once for all, and He sat down. It never had to be done again. Hebrews 9:11-12: "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands; that is, to say, not of this creation – the good things to come of the church age. And not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, he entered the holy place once for all (the heavenly holy place), having obtained eternal redemption." "Once for all" – do you see how the Holy Spirit keeps putting that in there? The Spirit of God knew that, someplace down the line, some religious system, or some religious leader was going to say, "We have to sacrifice Jesus Christ again. We have to put Him on the cross again. Therefore, we need an altar so that we can symbolically, at least, sacrifice Him again to cover our sins."

Christ said, "Once for all." That's man's way against God's way. Hebrews 10:10: "By this will we have been sanctified (set apart) through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." The book of Hebrews was written to Jews who were going back to the legalisms of the Old Testament. And one of the legalisms they were going back to was trying to get the sacrificial system going again. So, that's why, repeatedly, the writer (probably the apostle Paul) kept hitting away with the phrase "once for all." You don't repeat the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And anybody who says that you do is heretical, and it's blasphemy against the grace of God.

1 Peter 3:18: "For Christ also died for sins, once for all; the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit." Christ died bearing the sins of the world. He was resurrected. And He now sits enthroned in heaven, awaiting the time for our arrival there on the basis of the fact that He has given us the propitiation. He has satisfied the justice of God against our sins, so that there is no reason for us to be kept out of heaven. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved."

1 John 2:2: "And He Himself (the Lord Jesus Christ) is the propitiation (the satisfaction) for our sins. And not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." What a horrible statement that is. Not only does He cover all of us, so that we can go to heaven, because our sins have been covered by Him, apart from any doing on our part, but even all those who end up in hell – their sins are all paid for. But they wouldn't believe it. And they wouldn't accept the grace of God without contaminating it with their human works.

It's a very dangerous thing to say, "I believe that Christ is the Savior who died for our moral guilt, and I now add my ritualistic works: my baptism; my Lord's Supper; and, all the good works I do, in order to confirm my place in the kingdom of God." If you put in works, it's no longer grace, and you will not be saved.

In the church that I visited in Norway, with this grand altar up front, paid for by tax money, on each side of the altar, for the first time, I saw something that I'd never seen before: two large, prominent statues. On the left was Moses, holding the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) on a book. On the right of the altar was Aaron, the first Mosaic high priest. When I saw that, I thought, "Isn't that interesting?" Here was a church descended from the Reformation whose leader did not understand the distinction between Israel and the church in God's plan of the ages. So, it assumed that everything that belonged to Israel was not transferred over to the church, and the church age became the fulfillment of the age of the Jew. And with that kind of thinking clearly portrayed there, it was indeed fitting – that Aaron, the first high priest of the long line of priests that you'll have to go through to get to God should be up on that altar, and that Moses, the great law giver, under whose laws you will live while trying to make it with God, should be on the other side of the altar. What a travesty in a Christian church – to have that demonstration of that misconception, of the mixture of Israel and the church. These two leaders were indeed fittingly associated with an altar, because it was the symbol for them of the future final sacrifice of Jesus Christ for sin.

However, unlike the Roman Catholic Church, which also has altars, they at least have a logical reason. The Roman Catholics say, "We sacrifice Jesus Christ every time we run the Mass. So, you have to have an altar, because you're doing sacrifices. But here, in the Lutheran tradition, this pastor had no sacrifice to make under the principle of their rallying cry of the reformation: "justification by faith, apart from works." How would anybody who rallies around justification (being declared absolute righteousness) on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ, apart from any human works added, stand in front of an altar which requires sacrifice to satisfy the justice of God. The inconsistency borders over into an insult.

The pastor-priest before an altar further suggests something very serious, I think, in the fact that it seems to indicate that he needs to plead with God to be merciful to the sinners of the congregation instead of committing them to John 3:16 – to believing in Christ as Savior: "For God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son (that is, His unique Son – His distinct son), that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life;" and, then to direct them to 1 John 1:9, to maintain their day-by-day walk with God: "If we confess (as Christians) our known sins, He is faithful and just." Faithful – He'll do it every time you confess. Just – on the basis of the fact Christ has paid for that sin: "To forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" – to restore us to His personal walk and fellowship, even for the sins we can't remember, that we have forgotten. This contamination of the gospel and the distinction of the grace age is horrendous.

Some of you have been reading the interesting book by Tim LaHaye. It's a novel called Left Behind. There will be seven books in this series. Left Behind is the first one, in which the rapture takes place, and it describes what has happened to people who had loved ones who were saved. They're suddenly gone. It further describes what has happened to society at that point in time: the airplanes; the cars on the road; and, suddenly people disappear. They're gone, and people who have been warned that this is coming, put two and two together and say, "It is true. It did happen." Well, in the process of the associate pastor of the church who was left behind, because he was not a Christian, but he was just a good religious man, he knew what had happened, and it brought him to his senses. And gradually, he begins to carry out an outreach of testimony to people, saying, "Here's what happened. I know. I was part of this unbelieving group, and I have suffered this consequence."

Well in the process of writing this novel (and I'm very sorry to see that they did this), what did they do but contaminate the gospel? I could not believe it. They contaminated the gospel. They could not just say, "If you want to be saved, it is time now to believe God's message, which you refused to believe before the rapture. You can still go to heaven. You're not going to be part of the body of Christ. You'll never have all those privileges in eternity that Christians will have. But you can be born again. Trust in Christ – believe the gospel. That's what the Bible says. That's what the Holy Spirit uses to bring conviction. That's all you need. What do they do?

Before it's through, the phrase repeatedly comes up: "Pray the prayer. If you want to be saved, pray the prayer." How about Jim? Has he prayed the prayer, meaning: "Has he accepted Christ?" How about Susie? Has she prayed the prayer? Can you see how cleverly Satan has degenerated being saved by an act of faith into a human act? "We're not going to be saved by works, but we'll give you this work. Pray a prayer, and you're on your way. Let's print it up. Let's publish it everywhere. Everybody who wants to go to heaven, pray this prayer: 'Lord, I know I'm a bad guy. I'm a bad sinner . . . , but I really want to accept you, and I hope you'll take me into heaven.'" They have some kind of a prayer, and they think: “Now, I've prayed it. I've done the work. I'm the monkey that jumped through the hoop. I'm saved.” No, you're not. That's the same thing as asking people to walk down an aisle, and connecting salvation with a human act externally of that nature.

So, when you read the book, just weep at that point – that when it came time for the great testimony that should be given, they just could not stay away from pop Christianity cutesy-pooh phrases, and just simply stay with the biblical message, and, in fact, interject what is virtually a salvation-by-works system.

It is a sad contradiction then of the great reformation recovery of doctrine of the universal priesthood of the believers in the church age. That's what's terrible. One of the great things that came out of the age of the Reformation was that they recovered the doctrine that every Christian is his own priest, and he represents only Himself before God.

2 Timothy 3:5 describes what this mixing of Israel and the church has done, when the apostle Paul when he says, "Holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power – avoid such men as these." So, the power of the church age is dissipated.

**The Nature of the Church**

1. **The First and Second Comings of Christ**

However, we live in the wonderful age of the church. We have a few things to observe about the church that Paul is referring to here in our Colossians passage. The church age fell between two known peaks of history; that is, between the First and Second Comings of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:11: "Seeking to know what a person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating, as He predicted the sufferings of Christ, and the glories to follow." Peter, in describing the return of the Lord said that the Old Testament prophets, when they read about the Messiah's coming, were confused. They were trying to pinpoint the conditions under which He would come. And they found some passages that said that He was going to come as a suffering Lamb, and experience death. Then other passages said that He was going to come as a glorious King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And the old rabbis scratched their heads, and said, "This is a contradiction. How can the Messiah come as a suffering Lamb and as the conquering King of the tribe of Judah?"

Well, what they didn't know was that there would be two comings. And they didn't know that it was like two peaks on a mountain. They stood there, and to them, it looked like one peak, from their line of sight. But there was the First Coming, and then there was the Second Coming. What they didn't see, thinking that it was just one coming, was the valley of the church in between – 2,000 years almost, and probably all there will be. So, the church age is in a distinct chronological time frame between the First and Second Comings of Christ.

1. **The Baptism of the Holy Spirit**

The next point about the nature of the church today is that every time a Jew or gentile believes in Jesus Christ as Savior, he is instantly baptized by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13) into the body of Christ, the church, just as happened on the day of Pentecost. Every time a Jew or gentile believes, he is baptized automatically into the body of Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:13: "For by one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks (that is, gentiles), whether slaves or free, we are all made to drink of one Spirit" (we are all filled with one Holy Spirit).

You can see what a travesty it is when the charismatics invite people in their congregations to pray for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. If you haven't been baptized by the Holy Spirit, you're not even in the family of God. And if you're not in the family of God, there's no one for you to pray to out there. God does not listen to the prayers of unbelievers.

Ephesians 2:11-22 give you further great detail on this, as well as Galatians 3:26-28. Jew and gentile are baptized into one body by the Spirit of God.

1. **The Body and the Bride of Christ – not the Fulfillment of Israel's Promises**

The next point on the nature of the church is that the church's mission is not to fulfill God's Kingdom promises to Israel in the Abrahamic, Palestinian, Davidic, and New Covenants given to the Jews, but to gather out of mankind, a special, grace-oriented people for Jesus Christ as His body and His bride. Ephesians 1:22-23: "And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body; the fullness of Him who fills all in all." This is the church of Jesus Christ which is being filled by the Person of Christ." It is the fulfillment of a totally different program. The church is not the fulfillment of the program and the promises to Israel.

Then there is 2 Corinthians 11:2: "For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy, for I have betrothed you to one husband; that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin." There we have the church as the bride of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then, we have Revelation 19:6-8: "And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, and as the sound of many waters, and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, 'Hallelujah, for the Lord, our God, the Almighty reigns (the millennium has come). Let us rejoice and be glad, and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.'" The whole 1,000-year millennium is going to be a marriage feast celebration. "And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints."

That is an interesting verse. I have noticed that brides are very interested in their bridal gowns. They spend a great deal of time on it. They spend a great deal of preparation in designing it, and very carefully trying to keep it clean. They don't want any India ink splotches right on the front, or anything like that. Then they go to the marriage.

Do you realize that you and I are all making our wedding dresses? And do you know what we're making it out of? We're making it out of our divine good works, performed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit: saying "Yes" to the callings that He gives us; and, "Yes" to the missions that He calls upon us." I guarantee you that there are some Christians who are going to walk down that aisle, in the marriage of the Lamb, in rags – people who had everything in the world down here, but they didn't have time for Christian service; they didn't have desire to give God's money back to Him; and, they didn't have the interest in using their gifts to fulfill the mission for which they were born. They're going to walk down in rags.

1. **The Church was a Secret (or a mystery) in the Old Testament**

Then the fourth thing about this wonderful age of the church is that the church is never found in the Old Testament, because it was then a secret, or a hidden plan of God. The Bible says that it was, in fact, a very great mystery. God kept it to Himself. In Romans 16:25-26, this is pointed out: "Now to Him, who was able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested; and, by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandments of the eternal God, has been made known to all nations, leading to obedience of faith."

A mystery in the Bible is not something scary, but something secret. The Old Testament kept very careful cover by the Holy Spirit on the age of the church. It was never revealed. Ephesians 3:8-10 describe the same mystery. Using the King James Bible, people who are not versed in Scripture, used to love to bring up Acts 7:38. I'm just going to mention this to you in passing, in case somebody hits you with that. Acts 7:38 said, "This is the one (referring to Moses) who was in the congregation in the wilderness, together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers, and he received living oracles to pass on to you." Now in the King James Bible, it said, "This is the one who was with *the church* in the wilderness." And it uses the translation "church" because it *is* the word "ekklesia." But "ekklesia" is the Greek word that had the general meaning of an assembly, or a gathering. So, this is a congregation (a gathering) of Jews under the Old Testament Mosaic Law. It had nothing to do with the gathering under the church age.

1. **The Rapture**

The church age will end with the rapture of the church. Living and dead are going to meet Christ in the air, and be escorted into heaven as God then fulfills, on earth, Israel's final seven years of prophecy – the tribulation years. This is described for us in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17: "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus (Christians who have died). For this we say to you by the Word of the Lord: that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with a voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first." At the rapture event which is described here, the people who go up to meet the Lord in the air first are all the Christians who are in the graves.

Verse 17: "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord." This is the end of the church age, but it is not the end of the era of Israel's history. Once the church is gone, then the prophetic clock starts ticking again on Israel's history. And once again, the result is that God begins dealing with Israel as a nation, and concludes all the promises of the covenants. This rapture event is the next thing that's going to happen in the prophetic program of God, and you are going to be the star performers at that event.

This is the same thing that Jesus was referring to in John 14:2: "In My Father's house are many dwelling places. If it were not so, I would have told you, fore I go to prepare a place for you." And in verse 3 is the rapture: "If I go and prepare a place for you (that is, the dwelling places of the new Jerusalem), I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." This is not the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. This is the rapture coming for us, which is described here in 1 Thessalonians 4. All of this very wonderful truth of God has been so confused and so lost, because of the attempt to mix Israel and the church into one program, and to make the church the depository of all the promises of Israel. The people who say that, I notice, don't say that all the curses of Israel also go to the church.

You cannot even read Scripture literally once you do that, because God said to Abraham, "I'm going to make a promise to you, Abraham, and it's going to be eternal. It's not going to be dependent upon whether you behave or not. All you're going to do is accept My promise. And you're going to do that by getting out of Ur of the Chaldees and start the journey around to the Promised Land. Once you move out, the promise is set." Abraham said, "Oh, God, how do I know this is going to happen? How will I be sure of that?" God said, "Lie down, Abraham." And He put Abraham into a deep sleep. And all of a sudden, Abraham had a huge, dramatic vision, and he sees a smoking-like furnace. The Scripture describes a smoke pot that comes. And he sees on the ground animals laid out, which have been cut in half.

In the Old Testament times, you made an agreement with a man. You were going to do something; he was going to do something; and, you were going to sign a contract, so to speak. You put the animals out on the ground. He took you by the arm; you took him by the arm; and, you walked between those dead those two parts of the dead animal, as a testimony before God. You took an oath that you would perform the agreement that you had made with one another. So, Abraham is amazed by this. He expects that God is going to call him to walk between these animals, cut in half, lying there on the ground. But instead, the smoking furnace, which Abraham recognizes is a symbol of God, moves between those animal parts by itself. And Abraham had his answer: "How will I know this is going to happen? How will I know that the promises of God to make my people an eternal people, in an eternal city, and in an eternal land, for all eternity – the earthly people of God? God has just made a promise to me by His Own character, and He cannot lie. And it's not going to depend upon me (Abraham), or my descendants, who indeed were very unfaithful" – a promise still held.

So, when we Christians are gone, Israel is there for its final moments. And in that time (very shortly), after the tribulation begins, they too are going to get the word about salvation. They too are going to be impacted by the Holy Spirit, until there are 144,000 men that are going to be evangelists – 12,000 from each of the tribes. And they will go all over the earth. And they will begin proclaiming the same gospel – salvation by the grace of God: trusting in the Christ who has covered your sins. You're not going to be part of the church, but you will go to heaven, and you'll be part of the Old Testament body of believers, in their relationship to God.

This dramatic witness goes everywhere. These people are under the protective custody of God. None can harm them. And the antichrist is driven crazy by the message of these people which is going forth, as he sits in his headquarters in Babylon.

This is a great time which is coming before us. We Christians, dead and alive, will join together to meet Christ in the air. In the meantime, we have our mission. In the meantime, you have your life. In the meantime, you have your resources. In the meantime, get off the treadmill.

It makes me very sad when I see people (believers of God, with great potential to do great works for the Lord God), who stand on a treadmill, and they've got so many years. Then, bingo! There they are in heaven. You've had the allotted time. God says, "I'm going to give every one of you, on average, 70 years. But some of you, I'm going to kick you up a little higher. I'm going to give you a good genetic structure. I'm going to tell you how to hang on to good health, and how to do the things that make for good health. And the Bible says, "By reason of strength, I'm going to give you bonus year." And every year you live after 70 is an act of great divine grace. For what reason? A specific mission.

So, are you going to stand before the Lord God in heaven, and have all those years of grace, even beyond your 70, and say, "I blew every one of them, because I wasn't focused upon living my life? Instead, I just acted like I was on a treadmill, plodding along, and just waiting out the time that had been allotted to me – just waiting out the clock until it's all over." . . . We have a great future, and that should not be so.

So, as we approach rally day, it's a time of new beginnings. It should start today.

Dear God, our Father, we thank You for this, Your Word. Seal it to our understanding. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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