***Focusing on the Word of Life - PH55-01

Advanced Bible Doctrine - Philippians 2:17***

We are studying Philippians 2:16 where the apostle Paul has said, "Holding forth the word of life, that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither labored in vain." We have pointed out to you that the apostle Paul has taught these Philippian Christians that the top priority of their lives is to take in the Word of God–to learn Bible doctrine. You and I are not born with an understanding of the content of the Word of God. We are born with a deficiency, the Bible tells us, in our souls–a complete blank toward spiritual things. If we in ourselves, try to sit down and, through logical human reasoning, make decisions concerning how we think God should act toward us; toward our sin; and, toward our destiny in the future, we're going to come up with wrong answers. There is within us an old sin nature that leads us exactly down the blind path of what the Bible says the end thereof is death.

So Paul says the first priority of your life is to take in doctrine. The first part of doctrine is the knowledge of salvation. Once Adam sinned, he infected the whole human race so that every one of us is born with a sinful nature. That sin nature causes your human spirit to die the moment you take your first breath in the hospital as a baby. So from that moment on, you are at odds with the living God. There is no access between you and the God who is out there–Father; Son; and, Holy Spirit. You are actually in conflict with Him. You are under the doom of death, and there is nothing you can do to get out of that. This old sin nature within your soul causes the wrath of God to descend upon you.

If you go out of this life in this condition, with your human spirit dead, then you will spend eternity in what the Bible calls the lake of fire, and we commonly refer to it as hell. It is a real place. It is a place in which we suffer. It is a place of conscious torment. For this reason, the first priority of a human being's life is to do something about the fact that you have a dead human spirit because of your sin nature. The solution for death has been taken care by God in the fact that he sent His Son into this world to die upon the cross in your behalf. And all of the filth and the vileness of our personal sins were poured out upon Him, including the old sin nature.

Now, God says, "Everything is square between us. There is no conflict between you as a sinner and Me as God, providing you do one thing–providing that by an act of your will (that part of your soul), you accept what God has provided to cover your sin–the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ came into the world free of sin, and has taken your human spirit and brought it to life, in the moment that you received Jesus Christ as personal Savior. So today, we begin by telling you that if you are not alive spiritually, the first priority of your life is to recognize that you are a sinner; that you are doomed to an eternity in hell; and, that you can be the smartest person in the world, or you can be the dumbest person in the world, but it makes no difference. The old sin nature dooms you. For this reason, God says make this the first priority of your life.

The Bible says, "What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?" When this body dies, the soul eventually goes into a place called the lake of fire. In time, your body is resurrected, even as an unbeliever, and that joins you. So the priority of our lives is doctrine. The first doctrine is that, "God so loved the world (you and me as sinners) that He gave His only begotten Son (the Lord Jesus Christ), to die on the cross in order that we might have eternal life. Whosoever believes in Him shall not see death, but shall see life." It's a matter of having Christ. To have Jesus Christ is to have eternal life.

So God says, "He, who knew no sin, the Son of God, became sin for us. We had our sin poured out upon Him in order that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Now, that is a fantastic statement. That is a promise of the Word of God which is never wrong and which never lies. God says, "I will swap my righteousness for your sins." So when I ask you how good do you have to be to go to heaven, you have to be as good as Jesus Christ. That's how good. How do you get to be as good as Jesus Christ? By letting God the Father hand you the righteousness of His Son. The reason God can do that is because God's own justice has been satisfied toward your sin. God's own righteousness has been satisfied. He does not do anything wrong. God says, "I have to be true to what I am as God, and I love you. Now my love is free because of what my Son did. I can handle the old sin nature in you know, and I can bring your human spirit to life."

That's the beginning of life. Then you will understand the Word of God. Then you'll start entering into the principles of Scripture, and you'll start functioning as a human being instead of as an animal. That's what it amounts to. Your destiny will change from hell to heaven. Someday, when this body breaks down and dies, your soul and spirit will find itself face-to-face with Jesus Christ in heaven. "He knew no sin, the perfect Son of God became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him–His perfect absolute righteousness."

If you have done that, then you are a believer. The next thing is the taking in and the advancing in the Word of God. That's why we gather in these church services. The world is run by Satan. This world is evil to its core, in all of its institutions, and in all of its human leadership. This world is cultured. It's sophisticated. It's very wealthy, but it is evil in every way. Satan is having his day. The Word of God makes it clear to us that Satan is conducting all of the institutions of this world. You and I, as believers, therefore, find ourselves in a sea of spiritual darkness.

That's what Paul means when he says "holding on." That's what he means by "holding forth"–focusing on the Word of Life; that is, the Word of God, in order that you might shine as lights in this world. We are the hope of the world. The apostle Paul is focusing his attention on the fact that someday he's going to stand before that thing that we have been talking about as the Judgment Seat of Christ called the "bema" in the Greek. This judgment seat has upon it a throne. On this throne sits the judge. In the Olympics, when the athlete won, he came up to the "bema" and they put the laurel wreath on his head as a sign of victory.

You and I, as Christians, are going to stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ in heaven in order to have our lives evaluated. What for? Well, the books are going to be opened. We have so much time. God is going to evaluate what you did with that time relative to investment in eternal things. You have so much money. The investment in eternal things will be there. You will have taken your money with you or you will have left it behind according to your investment in spiritual things. That's what the Bible is going to reveal. You have a spiritual gift. The use or your lack of use of that spiritual gift will be revealed here at this Judgment Seat. Then there will be rewards given–not salvation. You already have that in the moment you trust Christ as Savior. But eternal life is followed by rewards for service. The apostle Paul in this passage has his eyes on this thing here. He says, "When they call my name out," and remember that it's individual. You stand up there all by yourself. And God says, "'This is what you've done. This is how you invested your life. This is the reward that is yours."

What the reward may be, I don't know. God says we are going to come back with the Lord Jesus Christ to rule in the millennial kingdom of Christ on earth when He runs this world. When Jesus Christ sits upon the throne at Jerusalem, and all the nations of the world now look back to the Jews as the leading nation of the world, and Christ is ruling the world, we are going to rule along with Him. I would like to administer the city of Chicago myself, for several reasons. You may envision some other area. But we are going to be administrators, for one thing. There are all kinds of things that will be the rewards. They are not spelled out. The Bible speaks in general terms about this. But there are going to be people who are disappointed. There are going to be people who are going to recognize that they were clowns with their lives as to how they used what God placed at their disposal when they could have made an eternal impact, and stood before the Judgment Seat, not only with eternal life, but with fantastic eternal rewards. And all that is determined this side of the grave.

Now, Paul has his eyes on that. Paul says, "I have faithfully taught you the Word of God. I want to be sure that I have not wasted my life. That is my motivation. My motivation is to prepare you Christians so that when you stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ, you will not be disappointed. You will have had enough doctrinal instruction that you will know how to have lived your lives so that God can not only bless you and give you happiness (that's part of the game), but also that you will be rewarded in eternity.

This is why you have to be careful how you view a lot of programs that come up in local churches. Local churches are always coming up with gimmickry and public relations of one kind or another. The newest fad is called body life. You can go back far enough in these movements and say, "Now, what started this thing?" The thing that started it was somebody who came up and said, "Hey, I'd like to fill all the pews in my church. I'd like to get people to come out." The motivation was success on the human level. The motivation was not, "I'd like to do something to make sure that Christians are winners when they stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ."

If you look closely, you will discover that many of these movements will say something like, "Well, folks didn't attend the Sunday evening service. So we thought we'd have a little sharing program, and we'd have this kind of a program, and that kind of a program." Then everybody hustled out to church, boy; the place was filled out; the offerings were big; and, they were really humming along. And some idiot thinks that the records are being changed in heaven. I'm telling you, friends, a report card day is coming, and these hotshot movements that are moving in local churches that do not teach hard core doctrine to their people are going to lead their people down poverty lane. Those folks are going to stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ, coming out of their big churches with all the pews filled, which is all right and great, providing people are there for instruction in the Word, and the Word is being taught. That's all right. But people who come from many churches that are filled are going to find that what drew them there was not the thing that enabled them to be victors at the Judgment Seat of Christ and to become enriched with rewards.

Have you ever heard anybody say, "Why didn't you come and visit our church? Everybody is so friendly." That's the same thing Neiman-Marcus says. You go down to Neiman-Markup, and they say, "We are so friendly here. Come and visit our store." So you say, "Oh, wonderful. That's what I want–a friendly clerk." You have said it too. You have said, "I don't like that store. It wasn't very friendly." I even hear banks advertising themselves as, "Here's your friendly little banker." If you have a friendly little banker, you know why he's friendly. When you start doing the thing that makes him friendly, he isn't going to be friendly any more. So this stuff from the world is drawn into the church, and we make clowns of ourselves believers, and you should learn to resist that. You should remember that what is to draw you is not because these folks are so friendly at this church because they serve such wonderful experiences.

The only thing that's going to count is what Paul is trying to tell these Philippians: "Make doctrine the priority of your life. Otherwise, you will go through life as a fool. You may be a high-IQ fool, but you will be a fool. You will waste your life. But you have the chance to make it count forever with great marvelous rewards–to go into heaven for all eternity enriched because you have invested your possessions, your capacities, and the gifts that God gave you in the plan that He has." God deals with us individually. Christ died for you as a person individually. He asks that you receive that gift of eternal life. He has a plan that is tailor made for you. It's just like he has one woman for you to marry as the ideal person in your life–a right man for a right woman. God deals with you as an individual. Therefore, His plan involves all the details. When you start clicking with that plan through doctrine, then you'll know what happiness is. Then you'll know what satisfaction is. Then you will no longer be floundering along, but you will have a purpose in life. That is what he intended us to have.

So the motivation for the apostle Paul is enabling you and me to be winners here at this Judgment Seat. Acts 20:26-32 express for us this same motivation for Paul as he spoke to the pastor-teachers at the city of Ephesus. You might want to read that on your own and see how Paul said, "The thing I did for you night and day was taught you the Word, and taught you the Word, and taught you the Word." They had social gatherings. They gathered for meals together. But that was all secondary. The primary thing Paul says was, "I am free of the blood of all men." Now, that's a great thing for a pastor-teacher to be able to say. There is nobody who would be able to stand up and say, "You didn't tell me. If you had only explained this doctrine to me, then I would not have acted like this in my life, and I would not have been at a loss here at this Judgment Seat because of it." Paul said, "I am free of the blood of all men."

**The Rapture**

So it is the day of Christ that we read of here in verse 16: "Focusing on the Word of Life, that I may rejoice in the Day of Christ" refers to that day when Christians are caught up to meet the Lord in the air. We call that the day of the rapture. Paul is not concerned here that he's going to be left behind at the rapture–that the rapture is going to take place, and he's going to be left here.

**The Timing of the Rapture**

Now, I want to take up this rapture question with you today, and the timing of it. It is the next thing in God's prophetic program. God has told us what He's going to do. He's telling us what He's going to do with the nations of the world. He has taken us into His confidence. The next thing that's going to happen in all these series of events is, suddenly, Christians being taken out of this world–in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, being caught up to meet the Lord Jesus Christ in the air. Dead Christians will be popping out of the graves in their physical bodies first. We who are alive, instantly our bodies are transformed and changed into the glorified bodies such as Christ had: a body that can never sin; a body which can never die again; and, a body that's absolutely perfect. Whatever deficiencies you may have in it now will be instantly healed and restored. Then we will be caught up to be with Christ in heaven–meeting Him in the air, and being led into heaven by Him. That's the next thing that is on the agenda.

Some of you have asked, "When does this take place?" You know enough about prophecy that you know that from the cross, we have moved along here for almost 2,000 years. But you know that someplace Christ is going to come from heaven. The Christians are going to be caught up to meet Him in the air. That's called the rapture. Rapture means snatching away. Then you know, from your studies of prophecy, that there comes a seven-year period of Jewish history, which is described for us in the book of Daniel, which has never been fulfilled. The book of Daniel gives us God's full program, a timetable for God's dealing with the Jewish people. That dealing was a period of 490 years. 483 years of that has been fulfilled. Seven years has been left unfulfilled, and those seven years come right after the rapture. Then starts the 1,000-year millennial reign of Christ on this earth. This is when earth reaches its golden age. All environmental problems will be resolved. All human problems will be resolved. Christ will rule, the Bible says, with a rod of iron. Anybody who gets out of line gets it on the back of the neck. An angel is there. You are there as administrators. It's a world of absolutely perfect justice and perfect order because Christ is here ruling it.

Now, the question is, when does the rapture take place? We are interested in this because this seven-year period is a period over which rests a fantastic cloud of gloom. This is a period that God says, "I am going to pour out my wrath upon humanity as I never have before. I'm going to pull out all the stops." If men have thought that they have suffered things of divine wrath before, they've been at a Sunday school picnic, because now wrath is going to come from God in heaven. That's when the fantastic things will take place in nature. A third of the earth will be burned up. Seas will be turned to blood. Fresh water sources will be literally turned to blood. Stars will fall from the heavens. Disease will be rampant. War will be rampant. Mankind, it says, will hide itself at the foot of a mountain and cry upon the mountain to fall upon it to try to escape the terror of life in the tribulation period.

The Bible tells us that this period is divided in half: the first three-and-a-half years; and, the last three-and-a-half years. There are some people who have taught that Christians do not escape the tribulation period. Some of you have come and ask me that, and I said, "No, the Christians are removed before the tribulation. The rapture comes first." You said, "Oh, I'm so glad to hear that." The more you read passages like Matthew 24-25 about the tribulation, man, it's a nightmare. If you read Revelation 4-19, where it talks about the tribulation period, it's a nightmare. It's such a horrible nightmare that people have dismissed that book and said, "Well, this must be symbols. This can't be real. This couldn't really happen to a civilized cultured world." But it is going to happen. And the world is shaping up for this to happen. So you have, perhaps, been relieved because I told you that the rapture takes place before the tribulation.

I want to tell you that the majority of churches believe that the Christians are going to go right smack into the tribulation, and they're not going to get out until the other end of it. We happen to hold the minority view. The majority view of churches, if you were to poll them, say that we are going into the tribulation period. It is not the custom of this church for you to depend, in your understanding of what the Scriptures teach, upon something that I have said or what is coming because I have told you that. This is not a pulpit personality-type church. This is a church which is based upon the authority of the Word of God.

**Pre-Tribulation Rapture**

So I want to show you why we hold the pre-tribulation rapture position. Pre-tribulation rapture means before the time of God's wrath is poured out upon the world. The place we get this concept of the rapture is in 1 Thessalonians 4:17: "Then we who are alive (we Christians who are alive on the earth and remain) shall be caught up together with them (that is, the Christians who have been raised from the dead, from the graves) in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. So shall we ever be with the Lord." That means that if you have a husband or wife, or someone in your family who has died, who is a Christian, that the grave is someday going to open up, and that person is going to come out alive in his human body, and that you will be there to meet the Lord in the air.

This word "caught up" is the Greek word "harpazo." "Harpazo" means "to snatch away," or "to reach down and to grab." It is a very descriptive Greek word. It tells us exactly what God is going to do. He's going to suddenly reach down, and in a moment in time, snatch out of the world all kinds of believers: good believers; bad believers; believers in fellowship; and, believers out of fellowship. Once in a while, you'll see a bumper sticker that says, "Warning: this car will be driverless in the event of the rapture." That means that if a car is going down the highway and the rapture takes place, the driver will be gone and the car will keep going. You can multiply this and see what this is going to mean to the world when suddenly this "harpazo" (this snatching out event) takes place.

This means a sudden force being exercised. Grammatically, it is in the future tense which means that someplace down the line in the future for us, this is in store. We know from God's prophetic program that this is the next thing on the program. This is the very next thing. That's why we say that the return of Christ is imminent. That is, it is at any moment. It could happen before this study is over. It is also passive. That is very important. Passive means that the subject doesn't have anything to do with it. You don't decide that you're going to go or not go. Even if you were to say, "I don't want to go to heaven in the rapture," you're going. You have no alternative. This is passive. You have to make the decision beforehand. I receive Christ as Savior. Then you're in. It is indicative which is used to declare a statement of fact. In the Latin Bible, this word is translated "raptum." From that we get our English word "rapture," and it simply means "the snatching away."

The debate is on when the rapture takes place relative to the tribulation, because no person in his right mind wants to go through that last period of seven years (that 70th week of Daniel) that Daniel refers to. This question has many practical implications as well as doctrinal implications. Those of us who are pre-millennialists believe that Jesus Christ is going to come before the 1,000-year period and set up His kingdom on this earth. At the rapture, He returns to the air to meet the saints. Then after the tribulation, He is going to actually come right down here and be on planet earth. He will come to the earth. We his saints will come with him. Then He begins his 1,000-year reign. So in other words, we believe that Christ comes before the millennial kingdom begins.

The Old Testament is just full of descriptions of this kingdom. This is what the prophets were constantly talking about–the Jews, the leading nation of the world, in a fantastic kingdom ruled by the Messiah king. When He came, they rejected Him. To this day, the Jews view Jesus Christ as garbage. But He is going to come. Zachariah tells us that when they see him, a nation will be born in a day. They will mourn as a mother who has lost a child. They will realize in sorrow that the Jesus Christ whom they rejected was indeed the Messiah promised to them. And then, this kingdom will be able to begin.

So among pre-millennialists, we hold the pre-millennial position that the earth's golden age is still ahead of us coming down the line. There are three positions on the matter of the rapture. There is, first of all, the post-tribulation position. That means that the rapture takes place at the end of the seven-year period. That means that Christians go through the tribulation. That's the post-tribulation view. Then there is a second view, which is the mid-tribulation rapture. This view has the viewpoint that Christians go to heaven in the middle of the tribulation, after the first three-and-a-half years. Then the rapture takes place. Then there is the last view, which is the view we hold in this ministry, and that is the pre-tribulation view which means that Christians go to heaven before the tribulation begins, and that we do not go through this time of the outpouring of God's wrath on earth. If you go through the tribulation period, that indicates that you are an unbeliever. Christ returned and left you behind. You are then going to experience all of the things that unbelievers will experience.

Within the pre-tribulation position, there is another position, and I should just mention it. That's called the partial rapture theory. That is that, while the return of Christ for the saints is before the tribulation sorrow era, not all the Christians go. Only those of you who are nice Christians go before the tribulation. The godly Christians go. Those of you who are the sweet kind; those of you who smile and use the right vocabulary; those of you who do not smoke (and you do not chew, and you do not go with girls who do); all the good people; and, the good kind of Christians, you're going to go. But all you hoods are going to stay behind and get purged out in the tribulation period.

**Hope**

This is almost so ludicrous that I hate to spend any time on it, but I don't want you to be in ignorance if some joker springs it on you, so I'm going to mention it. But I am more concerned to establish why we say that you are not going to face God's greatest outpouring of wrath upon this world. I want you to be able, indeed, to say, "Now, that is a comfort." This is one of the things that 1 Thessalonians tells us. This is a comforting hope. Now, what kind of comforting hope is it for me to say, "Boy, you're going to experience all hell before you go to heaven when God pours out his wrath and judgments on this earth? Man, it's going to be a nightmare, and you're going to be in it. What kind of hope is that? There's no hope at all. That is the point–that we have a comfort to realize that we are going to be preserved from this.

**The Church and Israel**

The reason for that is this. It is important, first of all, to remember what we mean by "the church" ("the New Testament church"). This word does not include all of the people of the Old Testament. This is not an all-inclusive word of Old and New Testament saints. This is an opinion that comes from covenant theology with its mixed-up views on future events. Under the term church, they include everybody who has ever been born again. That is false. If you hold this idea that Old Testament and New Testament saints are all in one body and group, then you come out with the post-tribulation view inevitably. The post-tribulation view is tied to a misunderstanding of what the church is.

Israel and the church, remember, are two totally different things. The minute you receive Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, you enter a sphere called eternal fellowship. Once you are in eternal fellowship, you can never again be lost. You are born again. You are born spiritually into God's family. This placing into the realm of eternal fellowship is accomplished by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It comes automatically. The moment you receive Christ as Savior, you are placed into Christ, and that means into the body of Christ. Immediately you enter a relationship with God, which is eternal.

Israel and the church are two different things, because this sort of thing was never true of the people of the Old Testament. When the people of the Old Testament were born again, they were never in Christ. They never had the relationship of being in Christ, which is called "the church." To be in Christ is to be in church, or it is called "the body of Christ. Church is not just a local organization. It has an aspect to it which is invisible, which people of all denominations who trust in Christ as Savior are part of.

So the church and Israel are never to be mixed. The church began on the day of Pentecost. The church will be completed on the day of the rapture. The church is made up of born again Jews and gentiles. The church and Israel are terms which are never mixed in Scripture. Non-literal interpretation of Scripture uses these as synonyms. So people say, "Well, yeah, Israel did misbehave itself. All those promises in the Old Testament, they're not going to be fulfilled anymore. It's all given to the church." But I notice they never give the curses to the church as well–only all the nice things. The only part of the church that's going to go in the tribulation is part of the organized professing church. That is because there are a lot of churches that, when the rapture takes place, they're not going to be effected much in their membership. Most of them are going to be right there the next Sunday, because they're unbelievers. And they're going to wonder why these kooky Bible doctrine oriented people down the street have lost so many members this week, while things are better than ever with them.

I'll tell you one thing that is going to happen in the liberal churches is that it's going to scare the fool out of them to seeing what is happening. When the television starts announcing planes crashing; cars going down the road without drivers; people gone; and, all the turmoil this is going to cause, man, they're going to come out to church next Sunday. Everybody's going to get religious overnight. But where the Word of God has been taught, those churches are going to be empty, except for the professing few who are fakes–who have not received Christ, and who are just religious people.

So the terms "Israel" and "the church" are distinctive, and only unbelievers in local churches ever go into the tribulation. But those who are believers do not go into the tribulation. The church is a "mystery" in the Old Testament. That meant it was never revealed. It was a brand new thing. It is separate from Israel.

So 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, that we referred to, tells you about how Christians are going to be caught up out of this world and snatched out by God at the rapture. And this only applies to those who are in the body of Christ. It does not apply to those who are Jewish believers. The church saints are not to be equated with Old Testament saints. They are never made part of that body.

Now, because the church saints are a separate program in God's dealings, it would be logical that we would expect them to have a separate removal from the earth when the time came for God to return to his dealings with the Jews. Up to the cross, God was dealing with the Jews. Then, when they rejected the Savior, God began building the body of Christ, the church. For all of these 2,000 years almost, that has been taking place. But the seven years of God's prophetic clock stopped clicking. Up to now, it clicked along–483 years, just exactly the way Daniel predicted. There was one world empire after another, just exactly the way the book of Daniel projected, hundreds of years in advance. The clock has no longer been moving. But once we get to the rapture, then the pendulum on the clock begins swinging once more, and the seven years of the tribulation now begin ticking off.

When God starts dealing with the Jews again, at this point, it is obvious that we logically may expect (there are other reasons, but we're just dealing with it logically now) that the church should be out of the picture. The two are never mixed up. If you do mix them up, you cause yourself a great deal of confusion.

One way you can check this out is by thumbing through the book of Revelation from chapters 4-19, which cover this tribulation period. You will discover that the church is never there. In the first three chapters, the church is dealt with in its local scene. Then suddenly, from chapters 4-19, there is no mention of church; no mention of Christians; and, no mention of the body of Christ. It only talks about Jews, because God is bringing his wrath upon Jews and gentiles, and the church is not included.

**The Tribulation**

Let's look at the tribulation as an event a little more. We view this as a literal event. One of the ways that the post-tribulationists get around the idea that Christians should not go through the tribulation is by taking the idea that Christians suffer tribulation in general. They equate the general tribulation we suffer as Christians as being the tribulation of which the Bible speaks. So you will find Bible teachers who say, "Well, the church is already in the tribulation. Christians have always had tribulation." They'll say, "You remember what Jesus said in John 16:33, when he said to his disciples, 'These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me you might have peace. In the world, you shall have tribulation. But be of good cheer. I have overcome the world.' In John 15:20, He says again the same thing to them: 'Remember the word that I said unto you. The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If you have kept My saying, they will keep yours also.'" We have this in Acts 14:22 and Romans 5:3. All of these describe tribulation for a Christian.

If you're the kind of a person who is a believer, and who is sensitive to opening up the gospel to people as you should be, and sensitive to leading people into a knowledge of the Word of God by maybe opening up the tapes or giving a tape catalog (something like that), you will, sooner or later, come up against somebody who resents it. You may be like the lumberjack that worked up in the logging camps in the north who became a Christian while on vacation down south. When he went back to the north to his job, he was concerned, and his friends were concerned how he was going to operate out there now that he was a believer in the tough climate of a logging camp. A few months went by, and he came back down home. The first question of his Christian friends was, "How did you make out once you got back to the logging camp, now that you were a Christian?" He said, "Fine, I didn't have any trouble at all. I don't think anybody ever found out."

Now, a lot of you don't have any tribulation as believers because nobody is finding out what you really are; what you really stand for; and, what you really think. But I know that if you put yourself on the line and say, "Hey, friend, there's a God out there; there's a hell out there; there's a heaven out there; and, there's a God who loved you enough to solve the problem of your sin. He's satisfied because His Son paid for every last one you'll ever commit. Now, the question is, will you receive His Son as your Savior? I want to tell you that that is the beginning of turning you from an animal level of life into a prince and a princess of the living God." If you talk to people like that, some will welcome it, and they will believe. Others will look upon you with contempt, and others will seek to do you misery. They will seek to do you misery for it.

So it is true that we as Christians do suffer tribulation. But this is a debater's trick, because we also know that the Bible talks about a specific period of tribulation identified within a seven-year range of time, and it is spoken of in many places in the Bible (Deuteronomy 4:29-30). Jeremiah 30:4-11 has a big passage on it. Also see Daniel 9:27 and Daniel 12:1. Many places in the Scriptures describe a particular era of the outpouring of God's wrath, and that is called the period of tribulation. That is a different thing than we Christians just suffering for our faith. The specific seven years of unprecedented trouble upon the Jewish people is in the future.

How do the post-tribulationists handle it? They just spiritualize it, and they close the two together. They just say, "Well, we're talking about tribulation in general. Christians are always in tribulation. So Christians do go through the tribulation."

Matthew 24:21 tells us that once this tribulation period begins, it's going to wind up and be taken up into something worse and worse all the time until the result is that the second three-and-a-half years are described as the great tribulation: "For then shall be great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." Here is a specific unprecedented time of trouble. It is a time that is going to come upon the Jewish people. You have to read the context of this chapter in Matthew. Jesus is telling the Jews what's going to happen. And He said, "You're not only going to come into the tribulation, but the last part of it is going to be a blockbuster. It is going to be the most explosive nightmare you have ever been in. It is going to be the great tribulation." But I want you to notice that the church is nowhere in Scripture ever related to this. It may use the term "elect," and it may use the term "saints," but God has other saints and other elect people than those who are in the church.

1 Thessalonians 5:9 puts it to us in very specific terms–in terms that we can draw comfort from: "For God has not appointed us (Christians) to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ."

The Philadelphia church that we read about in the book of Revelation was a church that was a Bible doctrine teaching church. That church was the apple of God's eye. In Revelation 3:10, we have the specific promise, "Because you have kept the word of my patience, I also will keep you from the hour of temptation (or the hour of tribulation) which will come upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth." Please remember that it is characteristic of our God to protect His own from the time when He is pouring out His wrath of judgment upon unbelievers.

Just remember Lot. Lot was given the chance to escape the judgment upon the homosexual cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Just remember Noah. Noah was given the opportunity with his family to escape the judgment of God upon the unbelieving world. Just remember Rahab the harlot. Rehab was given the opportunity to escape the judgment that was going to come upon the city of Jericho. It is characteristic of God to give us a way out. It is only when we are fools enough not to accept the door that He opens to us; to go through it; and, to escape, that judgment comes upon us.

So it is very, very much in keeping with the way our God works that we believers, who form the special body of Christ and are separate from the Jewish program, are going to be preserved from these judgments. Some post-tribulationists are pained by this. They say, "Well, yes, while we say that the Christians go into the tribulation, they're going to be protected from all the troubles."

Now, can you imagine yourself living in a world that's shot through with famine; a world that's engaged in war; a world where a third of the heat of the sun is cut off; and, a world where the seas are turned to blood? How are you going to escape that? Where are you going to have a little refuge to escape that? It isn't possible. The purpose of the great tribulation is the final divine judgment upon the Jewish people. This is because when Pilate said, "I find no fault in this just Man," they insisted on crucifying Him. He washed his hands before them, and he said, "I am free of this man's blood." And do you remember what the Jews said? "His blood be upon us and on our children." Those pathetic people did not realize that what they had done in that moment was to doom themselves and their posterity to this situation here of the tribulation period when God's wrath would be exercised upon them.

So indeed, they are going to get their wish. Upon the gentile powers who ride high and mighty in this world now, and who hold in contempt the principles of the divine laws of establishment, and who are increasingly moving away from the ground of morality, which is the only ground by which freedom is preserved in the era of Satan's domination of the world scene, these nations are going to be brought under judgment at the Second Coming of Christ. None of this is a comfort to anticipate.

So, therefore, point number one is that the very nature of the church as separate from the Jewish program, and the very nature of the tribulation period and the judgments are going to be on it, make it impossible for the church to be passing through those things and still for us to say that the return of Christ for us is a blessed hope. This is because what we have to look forward to in that case would not be anything that we would anticipate as a hope. It would be something that we would rather recoil from.

In the next session, we're going to take this up further, because some of the most significant points we haven't touched upon yet. But we're going to, I hope, lay out for you why, indeed, you can relax, and know that when the next and the final nuclear war comes upon this earth, you're not going to be here. You indeed will have been taken out to escape this.

But remember that it all starts with the fact that you have received Christ as Savior. I must stress that to you again, lest you think that what we have talked about is something that applies to you. Unless you are in Christ, in the family of God, through that personal acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ, what we have described for you is indeed your future here on this earth and in the lake of fire. God says, "I have provided everything you need. Why would you lose your soul while you may gain the world? I will give you not only the world, but your soul for all eternity."

So if you have no receipt of this personal Savior, we urge you to do that now. How do you do it? Raise your hand? No. Sign a card and promise to be good? No. Come forward and cry up here a little bit? No. Let us pray you into victory? No. Give a nice big offering? No, none of that human work's business. You only need to do one thing: "Dear God, I accept what you have done." Right there where you sit; without any public fanfare; and, by the act of your own will in your own mind, you receive Christ as personal Savior.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

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