

Sermon Notes

(A basic transcription with modifications for style and clarity)

ENDURE TO THE END

Cliffton Veal, October 29, 2016

When I was seventeen years old I ran away from home. Now, that wasn't a very mature thing to do, certainly not at age seventeen. But I had wanted to attend Ambassador College. That was my dream. I had been reading Church literature since I was twelve years old and I wanted to go to Ambassador College. Well, I found out that my mom did not want me to go to Ambassador College. She was dead set against that. So, what was my reaction? I ran away from home! Well, once again, that was not a very mature thing to do.

Some of you may be asking, "Well, at age seventeen how could you join the US military? Don't you have to be eighteen years old?" Yes, in the United States, you do have to be eighteen years old to join the US military because that's when you're considered an adult. But I had a recruiting officer who was very keen on getting his numbers up of those he had put into the military that month. So he was more than willing to sign my mother's signature to those forms.

Be that as it may, I found myself, then, in the United States Air Force and realized pretty early on that I needed to get out. Began the process of getting out and it was a long, long process. It took about a year and a half or so, but I finally was let go.

Now while I was there in the military, I was at a military base in Monterey, California – actually the Defense Language Institute West Coast – studying the Russian language, of all things. I began attending a congregation of the Worldwide Church of God in central California.

Now, when I began attending I showed up the first day. That first Sabbath someone came and picked me up, an elderly fellow. He was very sweet and very nice. He picked me up and brought me to services. Do you remember your first day, your very first day at services? Well, some of you won't because you were born within the Church and you were in a bassinette when you came. But, for some of us older folks, there was a first day and we remember that. I certainly do.

Just to give a little bit of a background, I had come from, shall we say, a multiply broken home and had not enjoyed what one might call a brilliant childhood in many ways. I walked into services and I saw families, families with children; children that

seemed to be basically obedient, that seemed to be happy. The families seemed to be happy. Now, I realize that not everyone that I saw there was going God's way and had a wonderful family because of that. But it certainly seemed that way and I think probably the majority did. They were happy families and happy children. I had never experienced that and it was wonderful! I loved it! I was so excited!

It was on that first Sabbath that I met John. He had one of the biggest, warmest smiles that I had ever seen. John was a tall young man. He was older than I was, but not by too many years. He was tall, he was about 6'3", he was single like myself and just so very friendly. Now, John had been in the Church about 3 years by that time and he kind of "knew the ropes". We struck up an immediate friendship. He took me under his wing, so to speak, which I think was a very nice thing.

As time passed I learned more and more about John. I learned, for example, that he was friendly. Not just with me, but with everyone. John loved elderly people and that was very clear. He would talk with them, he would sit with them, he would hold their hands. He would comfort them for hours on end. He would help them; he would serve them. And he would serve others during the week and at services. (Whether the ministers knew that or not, I don't know. But I saw it and it was very encouraging to me to see that.) He did it out of a pure heart, I believe. John was really a fine young man; John was a good example of a follower of God.

I was in that particular Church area for about three years. John and I were together a lot during that time, along with several other young people there in the Church.

Finally, I did get out of the service, out of the US Air Force, and was there for a while. But eventually I thought I needed to get back home. Home for me at that time was near Birmingham, Alabama, my home state; and John decided to go with me. He was a bit tired of the job that he had and he wanted a change. He wouldn't necessarily stay in Alabama, but wanted to go with me.

So, we struck out on a trip in my little Volkswagen beetle. They don't make those any more. They haven't for many, many years. But I had one and I loved it. I thought it was wonderful! Once again, on this trip I learned a lot of things through John. I think God used him, in many ways, to teach me some things.

We started off from Monterey, California down the coast; beautiful sunshine, lovely day, lovely everything. There we were in my little Volkswagen bug chugging down the coast. And about three hours into the trip I heard this horrible noise back in the motor compartment, which is in the back in a Volkswagen bug. And all of a sudden the car stopped and we sort of coasted over to the side. I was able to get off over to the side.

I was a bit distraught because I really liked my little car and we had just started on that trip and I didn't quite know what to do. John knew what to do. We were in a rather desolate area, I think probably somewhere down below Big Sur. He said "you go over

there behind that bush and I'll go over here behind this tree and we will pray about this and we will ask God to intervene." Well, that's exactly what we did and that's exactly what happened.

Sometimes God takes pity on us. He doesn't always answer immediately, but in that particular case He answered pretty quickly. We got back in the car, started it up and it just purred right along. I was very encouraged by that as, I think John was, too. But I learned a lesson. I learned to look to God first and that was good and that was right. And I learned that from God, the Father; but He taught that to me through my friend, John.

We traveled for several days and were somewhere in Arizona, I believe it was, somewhere in a desert region where there weren't many people around. There weren't many towns around and once again, it seemed, my little bug gave up the ghost and we pulled off to the side; the motor had stopped. And I really didn't know what to do. We prayed about it once again. I learned to do that and very shortly after we finished praying a big black pickup truck pulled up behind us. A man got out, sort of a nondescript guy, not necessarily friendly, not unfriendly. He came up to us and said, "What's the matter here, guys?" And we said, "Well, the car's not working."

We had it open and he looked at it and said, "Well, I think it's your 'whatever'". I don't remember what it was now, but there was something and it was pretty obvious to him that it was defective and needed to be replaced. He said, "Hop in, there's a town about eight miles up the road and I'll take you there and we'll get a part." So we did. We picked up a part, he drove us back to the car. He put it on for us, turned the key and it started up immediately. The man got back in his black pickup and drove away unobtrusively, never to be seen by us again.

Now you can't tell me that that was not an angel. I've always thought that God had sent us an angel to fix my car so that we could go on down the road. Maybe that's a bit ridiculous, but I thought that was the case and I still think that was the case. And I appreciated the fact that God intervened for us once again.

We didn't get all the way to Birmingham, Alabama. We split paths, we each went our own ways before we got there and I didn't maintain a lot of contact with John.

As the years passed, I thought of him often. I thought of what I had learned from him. One day I had occasion to telephone an old friend, who had been a mutual friend of John and myself. I hadn't really heard of him for a couple of years, so I thought that I would inquire because I knew this friend would know.

"How is John doing?" I asked. There was a pause on the other end of the line, a long pause. "You hadn't heard? John is no longer in the Church." Whoa! Brethren that really shocked me! We were not talking about him having gone to another branch of the

Church of God. He was out completely. It shocked me, it saddened me... it almost angered me. It hurt me very, very deeply.

I never found out the exact reason why he left. I have a pretty good idea and I'll mention that maybe a little bit later. (By the way, John is not the actual name of this very good friend of mine. I have changed that name so as to keep his identity secret, as you might say, to avoid any possible embarrassment on anyone's part, hopefully.)

I don't know what John did, I don't know why John left God's Church. But brethren, I do know one thing. One thing I know for sure. He did not endure to the end! He didn't. And brethren, that is what I would like to talk to you about today – "Enduring to the End."

I want to ask the question: What does that mean? What does it mean to endure to the end? What does that have to do with our daily lives – enduring? I'd like to try to give you, hopefully, from God's word, from the scriptures that we can read in God's word, some help, some encouragement, some direction in this particular regard. I hope to show you that there are a couple of different ways to endure and show you which is the best one.

Now, here we are observing the Feast of Tabernacles and that represents in a very real sense, one of the goals that God has set for us. But you know brethren, if we give up, if we quit, we won't make it; we will not reach that goal.

Why would we want to endure in the first place? Let's take a look at a scripture in Matthew chapter 24. A well-known scripture which is pretty obvious in some ways, beginning in verse 12. Let's read it from God's word.

Matthew 24:12 And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.

13 But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

The entire chapter of Matthew 24 is a litany of horrible things that will be happening at some time in the future. We know that. Well, do we want to make it through that? Do we want to make it to the goal? Do we want to be in God's Kingdom? Well, "he who endures to the end shall be saved." Now, it says here in verse 12, as we read: "Because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold."

At that time, in my history in God's Church and probably for many of us, I think many of us would have found it very difficult to even imagine that people's love could wax cold and they could break off relationships and not talk to you anymore. Well, we've been through some things since then, which have shown that that is possible. That is entirely possible. It's very sad, but it's possible.

The very concept of enduring, of course, carries with it the idea of enduring "something". You're enduring something. You're going through something. Brethren, we know that there will be trials. We know that there will be tests in our lives. We know

because there have been tests and because there probably are right now, we know that there will be in the future.

Some of those trials come from without. Some of those trials come from within. Some of those trials may involve persecution. That's not a very pleasant thought, but that may be one of the things that we will have to endure. There are some Church members that have had to endure a certain amount of discrimination - discrimination on the job because they're Sabbath keepers. Discrimination on the job because they are decent people that don't want to get in there and curse and have filthy mouths like most of the other people that they're working with.

Some of you know exactly what I'm talking about. Some of you don't because you're not in that kind of a working environment and blessed are you. I've been in both and it's not very nice. If you are the 'goody-two-shoes', people very often won't like you. And sometimes it is difficult to go God's way and to do the right thing. Sometimes we are persecuted for doing that. Some are persecuted for other reasons, for different things in our lives. We know what that's like.

Concerning trials and difficulties let me just insert a parenthesis here right now. In this modern era of the Church there has been split after split after split. You know what I'm talking about. We all know what I'm talking about. That has affected us anywhere from, depending on the individual; from being very disappointing, very discouraging or maybe even devastating. I think I've personally experienced all of those emotions.

What does it feel like to have the rug pulled out from under you? What does it feel like to have grown up with a certain foundation and then everything changes and people say, well no, that's not the foundation anymore, that's not important anymore? We don't do that anymore. What is that like? Well, most of us know what that's like. And many of you young people out there know exactly what I'm saying. You know what it's like. Some of you are there right now with all of the various splits and schisms that have occurred. You are there right now.

And I've got news for you, young people, many of us older folks have gone through some of those same things and some of those same feelings! As I said, I've felt all of those things at various times. How do you keep going when your world falls apart? When most, if not all, of your friends are gone. When you find yourself in a much smaller group and there's nobody even remotely near your age. What do you do? That makes enduring exponentially more difficult. I know that, I realize that. Or it may even cause you to doubt the reason for enduring. This is real life in the 21st century of God's Church.

I hope, brethren, that we can see, out of God's word today, in the Bible, that we can see some things that will help us to see all of this more clearly. I hope that what we read in God's word will strengthen our resolve to endure to the end.

In past Church eras there have been stalwart, God-fearing men (from every indication, members of God's true Church), who have actually laid down their lives for God's truth. Let's take a look at a scripture in Psalms 34, beginning with verse 15. I think we can take comfort in these scriptures here.

Psalms 34:15 **The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous...** (He is watching us in a very positive way because He wants us to make it. He wants good things to happen to us.)

15 The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry.

16 The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

17 The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears... (Why would the righteous be crying out? Is it because they're going through some trials and some difficulties? Yes!)

17 The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles.

It does not say, "And when we choose to go God's way everything will be wonderful and God will arrange our lives such that nothing bad ever happens. No trials come, everything is wonderful and sweet and happy." That's not what the Bible says. The message is: troubles will come and God will pull us out of these troubles. He will deliver us out of these troubles.

18 The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart...

And here is the key in discussing this entire subject now of enduring, of sticking with it, of persevering. Here is one of the keys. God will deliver us out of the trials if we are of a broken heart.

...and saves such as have a contrite spirit.

If we have a repentant attitude. Now what does that mean? What that means, in its most simple terms, is that we recognize that God's way is right. We also recognize that we haven't always been going God's way and that we've done some things that are wrong and we repent of that. We ask God to help us to repent. We ask God to help us to see what we should be doing and to get back on the right path. "A broken heart, a contrite spirit", we have to have that or we can't have God's help in an enduring and a continuous way. Because, if we're not going God's way, we put ourselves in a different category. The righteous, those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit, will be helped in this way.

Now, we realize and we see this also in the Feast of Tabernacles, the Last Great Day, the message that God gives us there; we realize that God will eventually bring

everyone or give everyone the chance to come into His family. And that is a wonderful thing, an absolutely wonderful thing. But right now He's working with us and He expects certain things from us.

19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. (Once again, we will have afflictions, we will have trials, we will have difficulties.)

20 He guards all his bones; Not one of them is broken.

21 Evil shall slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous shall be condemned.

22 The Lord redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned.

That should be a very, very encouraging message for us. God's eyes are upon us. He wants us to make it and He will help us. Going forward now, let's take a look at 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 12. Here is a fact of life in God's Church, if we are walking in God's way.

2 Timothy 3:12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

Not one of your happiest thoughts, but we have to realize what it brings. We have to realize what going through those trials brings. We have to realize how important it is that we endure through the trial, that we cry out to God. Certainly we just read that. We cry out to God. We say, "Help us, please". He intervenes, He helps. That strengthens our faith and we go forward. We endure; we're through that trial: "Bring on the next one." Well, we don't always think of it in that way and I don't mean to make light of that. But the next one will come eventually and when it does we cry out to God once again. We ask for His help, we ask for His intervention and He will help, He will intervene. We can be very, very thankful for that. Let's go up just a couple of verses previous to that, verse 10.

10 But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance,

11 persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch...

I find this very, very interesting. Here is the Apostle Paul. What, is he lifting himself up? No, he is lifting up God's way of life. Is it wrong to look at a person, to look at the positive example that a person gives us and say that's encouraging to me? Well, no it's not wrong. The Apostle Paul says you've done it and that's good. Do that! As long as I am following God, as long as I am going God's way and you see what I go through, the persecutions and the afflictions, you see what happened to me:

...what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me.

There's the emphasis. It's on the fact that God delivered him. Not that he did anything. He didn't, it was God that did it. But we can look to the example of a human being. There's nothing wrong with that. Paul sets the stage for us to do that. But we look at the example of someone who is following God, who is doing God's will and we can be encouraged by that and Paul said that we should be.

12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

Once again, we will be delivered out of it all. And that's important to remember. Did the Apostle Paul give up? No he didn't! The Apostle Paul endured and he endured a lot! Persecutions, afflictions, what happened to him at Antioch, Iconium and Lystra; the stonings and all that sort of thing.

Do you know what a stoning is? Stoning is not where they're going to toss some pebbles at you and make you feel bad. No, a stoning is, you take a big rock and you've got a group of people that are throwing these rocks at a human being in the hope that that human being's life will be ended by the impact of that stone upon his head or any other part of his body. That's what stoning is. And the Apostle Paul, more than once, was left for dead.

So he went through some things. It's not like: "Oh, well, he was persecuted at work." And I'm not making light of that. He was persecuted in the worst kinds of ways. But he said the Lord will deliver us from it all if we endure. He endured and he went on to other things, other trials, other happy moments in life, other things that he learned, other times with God's people. But he endured. He kept at it. He did not give up. We need to take that example, the example of the Apostle Paul, and not give up! Ever!

Now there are important trials from without. Sometimes trials come upon us from within. When I say within I mean from within ourselves. I've said this so many times. Sometimes we cause our own trials. We set ourselves up for difficult situations in life. Part of what we need to be learning, as we go forward, is not to do that. As we follow God's way we will do less and less of that. Let's look at Galatians chapter 6, verse 9.

Galatians 6:9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

Now this speaks to what I was saying earlier. You know, we've been through a lot. And some of our young people have been through a lot, some terrible things. They've been disillusioned, they've been discouraged. In many cases, they've had the foundation ripped right out from under them. As I've said, some of us older folks, too. We've been through some pretty nasty things and we were just trying to do good. So do we give up because, well, those people did this and said that and changed this? Do we give up because of that? No, we do not! We go back to the foundation and we say I am going to do what God says to do. And I will not become weary. And it is easy, very

easy to become weary. I know that, you know that. If you've been around for a while; and we've all been around for a while.

I began reading quite avidly, the literature from the Church of God that was made available to us, at the age of twelve. I was twelve years old. I don't know why I started reading that. Well, partially because of the home life that I came from. I needed some reference points, I needed some encouragement. I began reading that at age twelve and I'm more than age twelve now, actually 63 at the giving of this sermon. I've been around for a while.

Many of you have been around for a while. Many of you have been around for a lot longer than that; much, much longer than that. You know what's happening, you know what has happened, you know what has happened in your life. You know how discouraging that can be. You know how we can be tempted to quit. We can be tempted to give up. This is a critical time for all of us, brethren! A critical time for all of us. We cannot give up. We cannot become weary in well-doing. We cannot say; "After all I've done (I've heard this before and this is dangerous), after all I've done and look where I am and look what's happened to the Church; look what's going on, after all I've been through." Well, we'll be going through some more. We just need to realize that God will deliver us from all of the afflictions and we need to hang in there. Not become "weary in well-doing".

"Becoming weary in well-doing" can also have the connotation of becoming weak or even going the wrong way. Let's look at Mark chapter 4 and beginning with verse 14. Here we're talking about the parable of the sower. I won't try to give a thorough explanation of everything, but let's read through some of these scriptures.

Mark 4:14 The sower sows the word.

15 And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts. (Have you ever seen that happen? It can happen.)

16 These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness;

This is great! I love it! I've seen that happen, too. Oh, wow! Plain Truth magazine! This article is fascinating! I love it! And then, somehow they don't make it. They don't stick with it. They don't make the next step.

17 and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time...

And I'll get to this in a moment, having roots is extremely important and we'll see that echoed biblically also, how very important it is to have roots, otherwise you're just washed away.

17 and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble.

Are we of those that stumble? We can be, but we shouldn't be. God doesn't want us to be and we do not have to be, brethren. We don't have to be of those who stumble. We can be of those who hold fast. We can be of those who endure. And we need to be. We need to be!

18 Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word,

19 and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

You know, when your foundation is shaken you might look around for something else to hold onto. You might go into a hobby. You might start building your house out. You might do all kinds of things. And there again I'm not saying that if you have a hobby that's wrong. Or if you build your house or if you shine your car or something that these are inherently wrong things. Absolutely not. But if we allow those things to take over our lives, if we divert all of our energy that was going into becoming spiritually minded, if we divert that to somewhere else because; "Whoa, I didn't like what happened there and I feel shaken. And I just need something to take up my time or whatever." If we do that, brethren, we will not endure.

And this world is very attractive. I've said that so many times. I know it is and you know that it is. The world is very, very attractive. There are all kinds of little glitzy, glamorous, sparkly things out there, whatever they be, that attract our attention and draw us away from God's word, away from the realization that we need to stick with it, away from the realization that we have to endure.

Sometimes when life is hard we want it to be easy. We want it to be nice, we want it to be happy and fun. And there will be certain amounts of that, too. And we can be thankful for that. Some of you have had a lot less of that than others, some of you more. We need to not allow ourselves to be taken away and distracted by the deceitfulness of riches, the desire for other things because that will choke the word. And when the word is choked you're not thinking about the word. You're not concentrating, you're not studying and you will lose your desire to endure. And you simply will not endure. You'll fall by the side.

God doesn't want us to do that. He doesn't want that to happen to us. All of this can happen if we neglect the study of God's word. 1 Timothy chapter 4. If we neglect the study of God's word, if we neglect making God's word a part of us, if we neglect the taking in of how we should be, of concentrating on what God wants us to be -- if we

neglect that, then we will be neglecting our spiritual lives and we will not want to endure. Verse 14:

1 Timothy 4:14 Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.

Don't neglect that! Do not neglect that. It's easy to do. It's easy, as we read there in Mark chapter 4. It's easy to neglect and get caught up in the world. We have to be very careful that we don't allow that to happen. "Do not neglect the gift" and it is a gift. What God has given us, brethren, is an absolute gift. The world doesn't have that gift. He has given us knowledge and understanding and wisdom concerning His word and His way of life, that will eventually save the world. That's not what we will do today. Jesus Christ will do that. But we're learning to help Him to do that. And that's part of what we're talking about here at the Feast of Tabernacles – a time when that learning and that knowledge and that enduring can be applied to helping others. Verse 16:

16 Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine...

Watch out, be awake, know what's happening in your own life. Sometimes we just sort of drift along and we're dragged along by the current, as it were, and we're not paying attention. And that will not lead to enduring. It simply won't.

16 Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine...

We need to have our noses in God's word. We need to be reading the Bible. We need to be studying God's word, learning spiritual principles. We can listen to Bible Studies and sermons and learn more about God's way. It's extremely important that we do that. This is one of the ways that we will endure, by heeding the doctrine.

...continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

Of course, Paul was talking to Timothy and he was the one who was preaching. That's why he referenced those who hear him. But this is valid for us, too. It's certainly valid for us, too.

Now, it is also important to note that the inverse is true. The inverse, the opposite, is just as true. If we do not pay heed to ourselves, if we do not pay heed to doctrine, if we are not immersing ourselves in an effort (with God's help) to go God's way, then we will not make it. We will fail.

You've heard probably the term "willful neglect." I think that's used in the legal world. We know what that means. I don't think any of us would be guilty of that – willfully neglecting? Probably not! It can sneak up on us, though. It really can sneak up on us and we need to be very, very careful.

Now, getting back, just very briefly to that example of my friend, John. I don't know exactly what happened, but I can surmise from some of the things that I heard. He started his own business. He got very busy. Did he get involved with business and himself and doing things to the point that he neglected? I think there's a good chance that's exactly what happened.

We have to be very careful that we don't neglect unintentionally. As I said, we won't willfully neglect, but can we unintentionally neglect? We certainly can. We can become "weary" while we are trying to "do good". We have to be very careful that we are trying to do good, certainly, but that we don't neglect, that we don't forget about some of the basic points of doctrine; that we don't forget about what this Feast of Tabernacles means – what all of the Holy Days mean.

God has shown us -- God the Father, through Mr. Armstrong, has shown us this meaning. He's laid out His Holy Day plan for us. We read it right out of God's word. We understand it. We can be very, very thankful for that. God has given us that knowledge. He's given us that gift that we read about. But we can neglect that. With all of the best intentions, we can neglect that.

You know, brethren, I know what it is like to have to get up early every morning and go to work. For most of my adult life, for most of my teenage and adult life I got up very, very early – 5:00, 5:30 for many, many years. You go to work. I've had all kinds of jobs in my life. Some hard labor jobs, some desk jobs; various things. But I know what it's like. That alarm clock goes off and you're not really happy about that and it's difficult. But we have to keep going. We have to put one foot in front of the other and we have to keep going and we have to endure.

Let's talk for just a moment about some other points on how (we've already read several points), how do we combat, or how do we make sure we endure. Well, we stick to God's word. We get our noses in God's word. We think about what God says. We read God's word and we meditate on that. That's one way to do that that will help us immeasurably.

What are some of the other things that we can do? I think we can combat the trials and the difficulties that come upon us, or combat the desires that may come about because of those trials: the desire to give up, the desire to quit, the tiredness that says: "Oh, I just can't do this anymore." We can combat that by keeping our eyes on the goal. We have to keep our eyes on the goal.

I was in the US military. I had a goal. There was a goal that had been set. It was to defend the nation or some particular military action going on. I was never involved in any active military actions. I was just in language school for the whole time before I got out. But the army has a goal, the government has goals.

We in God's Church, we as individuals have to have goals also. Now, God has given us the goals. He has set the goals before us. We know what they are. Here we are once again keeping the Feast of Tabernacles. That is one of the goals that God has given us. It's something that we are working toward. We know what is coming in the future, and we know that God is preparing a people. He is preparing us to help in the future. We're thankful for that, we're happy for that. Do we think about that? How often do you think about that? How often do I think about that? Every day? Probably not. Some of you do, but maybe not all of us do and maybe we should be thinking every single day ... and I don't mean just every day during the Feast of Tabernacles. I mean every single day of our lives. What is God doing with us? We are part of a people who is being prepared. We have to have a goal. We have to see that goal ahead of us.

I read a story several years ago, just a little story, that illustrated the importance of having a goal. There was an archaeological expedition that went into the deep, dark jungle. They were trying to find a particular site which they would excavate and find some very valuable artifacts. There were five people – the leader and four on his team, five men. They traveled a couple of days deep into the jungle and it was very, very treacherous and difficult – more than two days.

The leader became very ill. He knew, in the next day or two "I'm probably not going to make it. I'm going to die." So he got busy and he prepared some things and he prepared a note. And he left a note for those four men that made up the rest of the expedition. The note said, in effect, "I'm sorry. I wanted to make it through the entire expedition with you, but as you know I became ill and I haven't made it. It is very important. I prepared a couple of large boxes here. It is very important that these boxes with their contents be taken back to our administrative headquarters (which was about a three-day journey through the jungle, very treacherous part of the jungle). You have to take these boxes back." They were large enough that you had to have two men on each one; one in the front, one in the back of the two boxes with the four men carrying these boxes.

So they started out. He said, "You will be richly rewarded because of the contents of these boxes, obviously, but you have to make it back. You have to have that as your goal," so to speak. So they started out, two men per box because they were that heavy. And they slogged their way through that jungle for about three days. And it was horrible. It was very tiring physically and also mentally.

But they finally did make it back to the administrative headquarters, pried open the boxes and found stones; just plain old rocks of no value. But actually they did have a value because, had it not been for those stones and those boxes, the leader knew his men. He knew that they would probably fight among themselves or disperse and go their separate ways. He knew that all four of them would die if they didn't have the goal

of taking these boxes back. He gave them that goal and so these worthless rocks saved their lives, because it gave them a goal.

We have to have a goal, too. We have to have a goal. It is very important to have that goal. One of the goals, as we've talked about already, as you've heard mentioned at the Feast of Tabernacles, is about the Kingdom of God.

We are celebrating this Feast of Tabernacles, which symbolizes the Millennium. A time of war and fighting and suffering and disease. And how much of that is there in the world today? Turn on your television if you don't know. I've talked to people that say I just can't watch television any more. I cannot watch the news. And I understand that, but I make myself watch the news. I think it is important, at least for me, to know what is going on in the world. And what do you see? You see war and fighting and suffering and disease in this present world.

In the Millennium, brethren, that will finally be a thing of the past. That is a goal. That is something to look forward to with ardor. God wants us to see that. He wants us to be there. That is something to really strive for.

At the Feast, as I said, we will have heard a lot of messages about the meaning of the Feast of Tabernacles. Does that really mean something to us in our everyday lives? Does it mean something to us. Is it part of our "*raison d'être*" – our reason for being? Or is it just something, just sort of "highfalutin", that we hear at the Feast and yeah, I certainly agree with it, but real life happens then after the Feast. "How into this are we?", I guess is what I'm saying. How into the Kingdom of God, how into God's way of life, how into being prepared as God's people so that we can help others -- how into that are we?

Do we think, every single day, about why God has called us? How much time do you spend, how much time do I spend per day, per week, or per month meditating on the Kingdom of God and what that means for us? I know what it's like to forget. I know what it's like not to do that, because I've often not done that as probably some, or most or maybe all of you, also. But I know what it's like to be consumed with everyday life to the point that we are not thinking about some of the most important things in our lives.

But, we do need to ask ourselves: "Why are we here?" Why are we here? Mr. Herbert Armstrong used to ask that very often, on all the Holy Days and at other times, as well, he would ask that question. Why are we here? Are we here because God Almighty has given us His truth, has given us a part in what He is doing? Are we here to learn more about God the Father, about Jesus Christ His Son and our Elder Brother? Are we here to learn more about how we can be more like Them? Are we here to learn to help and to teach now, whenever that is possible and certainly in the World Tomorrow? Is that part of what we are about? Or do we forget that?

Have we become 'Sabbath Christians'? Sabbath Christians: we show up on the Sabbath, "Got my suit on, got my smile on." I'm a Sabbath Christian. And then the rest of the week I'm somebody else. I do something else. I don't think about these things? Brethren, I'll say one thing, this applies to me and this applies to all of us. If we don't know why we're here, if we don't see the reasons that God has called us and what He is doing with us, we will not endure to the end. We simply will not. James chapter 2 and verse 21:

James 2:21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?

22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?

23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God.

It is very important that we live our faith, that we show God that we mean what we say. That when we say we want to go His way, we mean that. There is that scripture also in James that says, "Be a doer of the word, not a hearer only." Are we doers. Are we consciously thinking? Do we set aside time for that?

I was listening recently to some tapes from a speaker who was talking about how to be more productive. He said you need to have some time every single day where you just sit and think about what happened today. What did I learn? What is going to happen tomorrow? What do you need to do? That is a very good principle. I've heard that mentioned many times in sermons.

We need to make some time, probably in the morning (and probably in the evening also; it wouldn't hurt), to take a few minutes, in the morning, what's going to happen today? What is my outlook on life? Why am I doing what I'm doing? How does what I'm doing fit in with (or the things that I can learn while I'm doing them), how does that fit in with my godly life? What does God want to teach me? And then in the evening look back over the day and say: What did I learn, what did I do? What could I do better? What did I do wrong? What could I do better? It's a good idea to do that.

We read earlier in Mark chapter 4 and verse 16 that there were some who endured for but a while. They had no root. They did not endure. So, you do not endure, you do not make it. You stop, you quit, you fail; if you do not have the roots. And the inverse of that is true. If we are firmly rooted, then we can make it. Ephesians chapter 3 and verse 16:

Ephesians 3:16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,

17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

How do you endure? What do we need to do if we want to be perseverers, people that keep on going, people that don't quit, people that will not fail? Well, we ask for God's help, certainly, and we stick to the basics and we ask to be rooted and grounded in God's word and we work at it. We don't just ask for it; we work at it. We study God's word, we think about, we meditate about what God is doing with us and wants to do with us. Very, very important. So, rooted and grounded in love. We need to keep the Kingdom alive in our minds. That goal has to be there. We have to see that, we have to taste it, as it were. And if we are rooted and grounded in love, that will help us to do that.

In a sense we have to exclude the world. I don't mean we become hermits and leave and live on a mountain top by ourselves or anything like that. It's not what I'm talking about. But we have to have some time where the world stays out and we concentrate on other-worldly things, godly things. So there is a proper way to exclude the world and there's a need for doing that on a pretty regular basis. And thinking about and meditating on the things of God.

Do you watch a lot of television? I have at times in my life. And it's not good. Are you thoroughly engrossed in a particular hobby and you spend all of your time doing that? Once again, I'm not saying hobbies are bad. I'm not saying that watching television is bad. Although, quite frankly in today's world, it very easily can be a bad thing; very easily. But are we wasting time, I guess is my question. Are we wasting time with frivolous things that really don't matter and not concentrating on some of the things that do matter? It takes work. Anything that is worth having takes work. And this takes work also. Going God's way takes work.

Let's look for just a moment at a couple of factors that are involved in this process of enduring to the end and they are faith and patience -- actively enduring, not passively waiting. I look at it this way. Patience gives us the ability to wait and faith gives us the will to wait, to wait for God, to wait for God to intervene in our lives. To wait for God to show us what we need to do, to wait for God to direct us, to wait for God to bring about the things that need to be brought about.

Patience and faith are both fruits of God's Holy Spirit. Once again, patience does not mean simply standing quietly in line, doing nothing, waiting for something to happen. Patience is "stick-to-it-iveness". Patience is perseverance, really. The word longsuffering itself (which is a synonym of patience) is quite interesting. The Greek word for longsuffering is "*makrothumá*". You can see that in Galatians 5:22.

Thayer's Greek English Lexicon describes that word in the following manner: "*makrothumá* is patience, endurance, constancy, steadfastness (What is steadfastness?

We stand fast, we stand firm. We're rooted and grounded.), *perseverance; especially, as shown in bearing troubles and ills.*"

Interestingly enough there are several scriptures in which patience and faith are mentioned together. Several! I would challenge you to look some of those up. I won't list a whole bunch of them now, but there are many, many scriptures where they are listed together.

Let's look in Hebrews chapter 11 for a moment, verse 36. Talking about some of the things that people went through, some of our forefathers; spiritually speaking:

Hebrews 11:36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.

37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented —

38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise,

That amazes me. After all they went through, they didn't receive the promises because many of them were killed. And yet they remained steadfast, they remained faithful. They endured through all of it. And these things are written for our example.

40 God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

It's a package! God has a plan! He worked with them; He's working with us. They obtained a good report through faith! They believed! They believed God. They thought about what God said. They read what God said in His word and they believed it. They had faith in what He said. Then they didn't even receive the promises! They will. They were delayed for a while. They will receive those promises. Once again, faith and patience, a couple of the fruits of God's Holy Spirit. Fruits that will enable us to endure unto the end. But these are fruits that we have to ask for! We do need to ask. God doesn't tend to give us things we don't ask for! Well, sometimes He does. But these are things we know that we need to be asking for and we should. So we need to be asking for faith and patience.

Now, as I have said before, we have all been through a lot. We have all been through a lot. But you know, according to God's word, none of us has been through too much. 1 Corinthians chapter 10, verse 13:

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able...

Now that tells me that when I want to give up, I shouldn't. Because God says don't do that. He says I will help you. You don't have to give up.

...but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

Over the years, brethren, many people have given up. But you know, *they* gave up. God didn't give up, because God doesn't give up. He never gives up on us.

So, as we've discussed today and as we've seen in several scriptures right out of God's word, we have to keep our eyes on the goal. We have to remember what we've been taught. We have to hang onto that foundation. We have to be steadfast, standing firmly, fast, steadfast in God's word on that solid foundation that God has given us. Which means that we need to be thinking and meditating and remembering what that foundation is; on a continual basis.

Then we need to have faith that God will intervene and He will help us. Then we wait patiently for that. No matter how long it takes, we wait patiently.

Brethren, we are standing at the threshold of a tremendous period of time, symbolized by this very Feast of Tabernacles. A time when tears will be dried, when suffering will cease. A time when God's supreme and holy law will be completely in force and will, finally, bring true and lasting peace to this earth. The exciting part is that God is offering us a part in that. But that, brethren, only if we stick with it. If we keep our eyes on the goal, if we hang in there. And if we do, there is a tremendous reward awaiting all of us.

Brethren, let's all endure unto the end! ♦