

"Therefore...Be Ready..." -- Matthew 5:44
Are you PREPARED Spiritually and Physically for Emergencies and "The Last Days"?

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Abstract: this Feast of Trumpets-type message shows we are in the Biblical "Last Days". Whether or not the "day of the Lord" and return of Christ are imminent, it is prudent to "BE ready" for all levels of emergencies. This topic touches on the Rapture, place of safety, how soon Christ may be coming, and what God wants in us, things we should have done in readiness for intensifying calamities.

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Greetings, brothers and sisters in Christ. I'm going to start a series of sermons that pertain to the coming holydays of God, and later on, sermons intended to be heard ON the holydays. The four Fall festivals are coming, including the Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day. This particular year, 2005, was a confusing year because the barley harvest seemed late in Israel and therefore the Hebrew calendar inserted an extra month, which they have to do every so many years, to keep the feasts in their seasons and to keep the calendar on track. Some felt there was enough harvestable barley, and so kept the holydays in September 2005 this year. I'm not sure who was right – but I commend those who at least looked into it. The majority, however, are keeping the holydays in October, with the extra month. The Fall holydays are always in the 7th Hebrew month, which can fall either in September or October on the Roman calendar.

In the first of the Fall holydays, the Feast of Trumpets, we are reminded of a time of the blowing of the shofar, the ram's horn, and a warning to prepare for catastrophe and war and chaos – and also of the blowing of the 7 last trumpets, and the resurrection of God's elect and our change to spirit. It's a very exciting time, and also can be a scary time, if you're on the wrong side of things.

This sermon takes the flip side of a recent sermon I gave —and asks you "ARE YOU *PREPARED*, as best as one could be, for disaster upon disaster that is going to happen more and more, as we come to the "Day of the Lord"?" Are you ready *spiritually* – as well as physically, as best you can be? From what I see in scripture, most of the world, and most of the church, is sound asleep! Of course that's what Master said: "all ten virgins slept"! Well it's time to wake up! Time to be trimming our lamps. I'll give a sermon or sermonettes soon on that.

In a recent sermon titled KATRINA – I discussed how we should not have a judgmental attitude as we see God trying to get the nation's attention. That was the intent of that sermon. I talked about how we should have an attitude of *caring love* for the people of the world. Some took my comments to feel I was somewhat soft on the world. Brethren, God IS the One who controls the weather. I was just reminding you of what our Lord says – don't condemn others when catastrophe comes upon them. Rather, He tells us, we *all* should learn, and we *all* should repent, even as Daniel did. Remember, as I give this, there are still 2,000 missing children. Imagine how you'd feel if your son or daughter was nowhere to be found. TWO THOUSAND! Have you taken time to *pray* for those children, to beseech God to reunite those families – or have we just been too preoccupied with other things, so we haven't? Are you refusing to help out somehow – financially, materially? Remember, with the measure you use to share, will be the measure used to us. If we are generous, it will come back to us, paraphrasing **Luke 6:38** – "running over, pressed down, shaken, many times over." Maybe you are not refusing to help, but just haven't gotten around to it. Brethren, let's love in deed - actions, not only in word.

Brethren, take this sermon as a *blowing of the trumpet*! The shofar (ram's horn) is sounding. The watchmen of God are sounding the wake-up calls, the alarms are going off everywhere! I'm not the only one. More and more of God's ministers *are* blowing the trumpet, and my hat's off to them.

HOW MUCH LONGER BEFORE JESUS RETURNS?

Jesus warned that no one will know the exact day or hour (Matthew 24:36-42). In that passage *He likens the final last days to the time of Noah's Flood*. He says they were caught off guard. But why should they have been caught off guard? Noah had told them, over and over, that it was coming. They saw the Ark being built. Surely many were aware of the animals assembling and going into the ark. Surely many were aware when the Ark doors shut and the family and animals were *in* the ark.

The point is: they weren't taking any of it seriously. They weren't "watching". They didn't believe. Let's not make the same mistakes! They weren't noting what was happening. Jesus also said when we see certain things happening, we should know it is *near*. That's where we are now, I feel. I hope we're in the last 20 years. I could be wrong. **But we should BE ready REGARDLESS of whether OUR end comes tonight or we die as an old man or woman in our 90's and Jesus still has not returned.** But perhaps even within 5-7 years, though I tend to think at least 7 more years. I don't know, except to say the signs seem to fit more now than ever. *I'd rather be looking – and have it not happen in my lifetime (unlikely)—than to be asleep and be caught off guard!!!*

Even if we're not yet in the final 7-20 years, even if asking the question could be premature, is it not prudent for us to do a personal inventory of whether or not we are ready for some rough times? Even if these "rough times" *aren't* the beginning of sorrows, even if they're *not* the start of the end times, ARE you ready for emergencies, tough times, rough times?

Have you noticed a lot of very dramatic world events going on lately? **Could it be** that we could be approaching, or are already in, *the final 7-20 years* before the return of our Lord and Savior? I know many have thought that before. **We can't be sure**. But when we see *four* massive hurricanes in 2004, 2 giant storm hurricanes this year 2005 labeled "storm of the century" – in just one month – what else can we conclude? Add to that the many, many other things happening...and we could be in the final 20 years. And these could be just "the beginning of sorrows" at that!

WHEN ARE YOUR LAST DAYS? DON'T forget: "the last days" for YOU, or for ME, could be at ANY time literally – with accidents, heart attacks, natural causes, weather and other disasters – and before we know it, our next moment of life could be standing before our Judge and Maker. **I believe "the Day of the LORD", however, is the very tail end of "the Last Days"**, perhaps the final year before He lands on the Mount of Olives. **ARE you ready?** Are you even conscious about "getting ready", compared to "being" ready? Is it even a major thought you have? It should be!

A DAY FOR A YEAR

Let's make this clear: A "day" in Biblical prophecy often refers to one year (Num. 14:34). The "days" or weeks of the prophecies of Daniel 9, for example, represent years. **"The Lord's Day" (Rev 1:10), or "the Day of the Lord" is about the final year before Christ lands on the Mount of Olives.** The period leading up to it is called "the last days", "the end time", "the time of the end", and "the day of Jacob's trouble". John's visions in the book of Revelation "on the Lord's Day" – are about events on "the Day of the Lord". He *wasn't* saying this was about things that happened on Sunday, as some people say.

Matthew 24:42-44 *"Therefore keep watch,* because you do not know on what **day** your Lord will come. But understand this: **If the owner of the house had known** at what time of night the thief

was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. **So you also must BE READY, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.**” (I like the translation “keep watch” much better than just “watch”. It matches the Greek better.)

Remember, we’re told in the next chapter – Matthew 25, please turn there – that the church will be sleeping spiritually just before Christ returns!! It’s going to apparently look like Jesus is delaying His return.

Matthew 25:1-5 "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. 3 Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, 4 but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. 5 **But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.**"

Did you get that? ***Though we’re warned by Peter NOT to think God delays His coming, we’re told here it is delayed,*** for whatever reasons. And during that time, the church – even you and I, slumber! And Jesus calls the servant who thinks he can do evil because “the master delays his coming” (**Matt 24:48**) an “evil servant”. **So we have to find the balance** of not overly setting dates, and yet being alert and prepared. But there is coming a time when the coming of Christ will not tarry any further (**Hebrews 10:36-37**).

So SURELY it is prudent, from time to time, to take stock of life, your life, and what’s important in your life and my life, and see where we are. ARE we ready for unexpected, dramatic and rapid events which are destined to change our lives?

Just watching the news lately where *millions* of people in the Gulf Coast suddenly have their jobs interrupted at best – and swept away at worst; millions evacuating massive areas of the country, businesses demolished, homes under water or simply vanished from the winds, where just a month before all that, it was peace and safety. Life as normal. They didn’t know this was going to happen to them so suddenly – just a few weeks before it did.

Our God says, the wise see calamity coming – and hide themselves (Proverbs 22:3). They prepare. They get ready.

So today I want to talk about being prepared for, first of all – ANY serious emergency time, and secondly – for “the Last days” just in case we are in the final 20 years before Christ returns – and at the least, being prepared for rough times, whether or not we have 1 year, 10 years, or 100 years to go. I speak as a fool, but just to make my point: being ready for rough times is just common sense. ***Don’t forget that troubles will progressively become more intense and severe*** as we come finally to the time of greatest trouble the world has ever seen! **Jesus spoke of His people having to flee from city to city**, before He returns (**Matt.10:23**). We may – or may not – have time to grab essentials when we do. Ultimately the time is coming that those in Judea will see certain things when it will be so rushed, they’ll have to flee to the mountains without even going back to their homes first (**Matt. 24:15-18**).

But today I’m talking more about being prepared spiritually and physically for emergencies and hard times in general, that precede that worst of all times. My point is, we’ll have many smaller emergencies, calamities and catastrophes that grow in intensity, for which we should be prepared – leading up to the final “Day of the Lord”. And we should always strive to already “BE” READY – not just be getting ready. That’s what Jesus said in Matt 24:44.

I'm going to emphasize *spiritual* preparation, but we'll spend perhaps 20 or more minutes also on some common sense physical preparations we should be doing and having in place also.

If we're indeed nearing the end of this age, we need to also take stock of our lives and be sure we're **engaging in the things which are important**; that we're the kind of person God wants us to be with everyone we come in contact with. We don't know, after all, how much time each of us has left – regardless of when Jesus returns.

We'll talk about:

- *how we know we're in "the last days" or whether or not we can expect Christ at any time or not*
- *whether or not there's a rapture, and will God's people be on the earth during the great Tribulation or raptured to heaven*
- *the spiritual and physical preparation we need to have in place.*

God tells us in **Proverbs 6:6-9** – "Go to the ant, you sluggard," who prepares for the rainy times while its sunny, storing up for itself for times of hardship. It's the old saying, "make hay while the sun shines".

Have "THE LAST DAYS" ALREADY STARTED?

There have been people through all time who have thought we are in "the Last Days". I believe it can *also be argued, by various scriptures that "the end time" or "last days" started, technically, with the coming of Jesus Christ 2,000 years ago.* (If you want, read on your own: **Heb. 1:2; Heb 9:26; Acts 2:17**, to see what I mean). To say otherwise would mean we'd have to say Peter and Paul were just confused, in error, and that God didn't really inspire the words "these last days".

Hebrews 9:26 "...but now, *once at the end of the ages*, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself"

Hebrews 1:2 "...*has in these last days* spoken to us by His Son...."

Acts 2:17 'And it shall come to pass **in the last days**, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh..." – Peter using what he was watching happen on Pentecost to "the last days". He was not wrong. He was not being mis-inspired here! So "last days" can be two thousand years. Compared to the eons of time the universe has been around, that's mere "days" in comparison.

But the final "day" – a year -- before He returns and the time in which Jesus is King – is called "the DAY of the Lord", but *before* that are the calamitous "last days", plural. We could be very close. I caution you though: I could be wrong. God has not whispered in my ear, so I'm figuring this out as we go. Why do I suspect we're in the **7-20 years?** Because for the first time in history:

- The Bible speaks of the very end of the end, as a time **when all human life could be eradicated if God did not intervene**. That was hardly possible before, unless the planet was hit by a monumental asteroid or something. But now all human life can be eradicated by man himself by many methods! We can eradicate all human life by **nuclear** warfare: we have enough arsenal to wipe out human life many, many times over. Man made famines; biological warfare, terrorism – are just 2 more means we have. And don't think mankind won't use WMD's – weapons of mass destruction. America did in Hiroshima. Saddam used

biological warfare of mass death on the Kurds. Cambodia did on their people. Rwanda wiped out 850,000 of their own in tribal warfare not long ago!

Add CLIMATE changes coming. The Arctic ice mass is diminishing. Hurricanes are more intense, more frequent. There are more and more warnings too about how close we come from time to time to being hit by an asteroid or large meteor. A large asteroid could certainly change life as we know it.

- The Bible speaks of the *end* time as a time when the true gospel of the kingdom is preached throughout the world (Matthew 24:14). Be sure to scroll down in my audio topics and listen to the first message I put on this website: *the true complete gospel*. Most churches are *not* preaching a *complete* gospel – but either *just* about God’s kingdom, or *just* about Jesus, the King of that kingdom. The *true* gospel is a *complete* gospel, so hear that message to hear what the true complete gospel should really be. I prove it over and over. Woe to those preaching a false gospel. An incomplete gospel would also have to be a false gospel.

Today, preaching the gospel to the *whole world* IS possible by means of internet, radio, rapid communications, computers, TV, and *so many* means – even to remote villages of the world. *Somehow, for example, even this tiny little internet site, is going all around the world. If you get something from these messages, tell others. Spread the word. There’s nothing in it for me. I never ask for money and I know only a handful of the hundreds who visit this site each month. But the word is going out.* There are people hearing this message in Singapore, Kenya, Europe, South Africa, all over North America – and I’m just one man in a small office without *any* means of external support, with *no* organization behind me.

Now imagine what could happen when God selects **His final 2 witnesses, or the Elijah** to come in the end time – as the Bible describes him coming just before “the terrible day of the Lord” (Malachi 4:5-6). John the Baptist was only a *type* of the final end time Elijah. Jesus said Elijah had come and *shall* come (Matt 17:10-13), in reference to John the Baptist, who was beheaded. Anyway, combine the witnesses’ miracle-working powers with the capability of modern communications, plus the coming Elijah’s message and miracles, and this gospel *is*, and *will be*, going to *all the world*! Never before possible in the same way.

But KEEP THIS IN MIND: What I’M talking about is being prepared for times of disaster – **WHETHER OR NOT** these are the final calamities leading up to the final year of Christ’s return!

BUT DON’T DESIRE THE “day of the LORD”!

Having said that, though we all surely want Christ to come back now, the Bible actually warns us NOT to desire the “day of the Lord”. Did you know that? Don’t be gleeful when you see these things happening. Don’t be!

Amos 5:18-20 **“WOE to you who desire the day of the LORD!** For what good is the day of the LORD to you? It will be darkness, and not light. 19 It will be as though a man fled from a lion, And a bear met him! Or as though he went into the house, Leaned his hand on the wall, And a serpent bit him! **20 Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?”**

When we're in the final 2-3 years just before Jesus sets up His kingdom on earth – it will be hell on earth, brethren! I believe from what scripture says, we will see **huge** earthquakes of Richter 8-10 in various **unexpected** places, **besides** the usual places. The little known Madras Fault near Missouri-Tennessee for example, can have an earthquake as it has in the past, that is so monumental that it caused rivers to flow backwards for a while. Besides **TERRORISM** of a magnitude and scale we have **yet** to see, we will also see **VOLCANOES**. **Yellowstone** sits atop a massive old volcano that when it last erupted long ago, darkened the whole planet!.

I expect to see **TSUNAMIS** regularly – with waves towering 200-300 feet high and more, engulfing our coastlines for miles inland. I watched a program on Discovery Channel recently that described a whole side of an island off the western coast of Africa that is expected to slide off and crash into the sea, causing a tsunami that will bury most of Florida and much of the US east coast.

The Bible speaks of **meteor** showers that affect the earth. **Wars** will increase in frequency, horror and magnitude. National economies will stumble. Hurricanes, storms, tornadoes, hail, famine, earthquake – and diseases which follow on their heels – will affect the whole world, until there is nothing more to share – and the love of many will wax cold, as it becomes each one for himself.

When the last of the very end time starts to really happen – the last of the last days – we won't know what hit us! That's what I think! We haven't begun to see the effect of hit after hit after hit - - tornadoes in one part of the country, hurricanes in another, earthquakes in another, a terrorist hit in another. And at that time we better know one THING: OUR GOD!

Our CITIES cannot evacuate apparently fast enough when it's time to get out. You **won't** be able to make it on your own, brethren. You will **need** divine assistance. And when you PRAY at that time, will you and I **know** that God is there, **close to us**, or will we have put Him so aside that we **won't** have the kind of relationship we will need to have with him?

Don't forget, everything is ultimately from God. Isaiah 45:7 TEV “I create both light and darkness; ***I bring both blessing and disaster. I, the LORD, do all these things.***”

Turn now with me to Amos 4 and 5. It's going to be a **terrible** time just preceding the return of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. I'm now going to read Amos 4 and 5, and on your own, you go back and start reading in Amos 3. It's a phenomenal passage. **GOD IS WARNING US. GOD is trying to get our attention. But as I said in the sermon titled Katrina”, we should not be POINTING THE FINGER at the gulf area**, but take this as a warning to all of us, to the entire nation! I know I'm focusing these words to those in the USA right now – **but the principle applies to any of you seeing this, in any country, anywhere in the world.**

Amos 5 is a good balance of a loving God and Father warning His people, urging them to come to repentance – and to warn against what is coming soon! But let's start in Amos 4:4.

Keep in mind that Amos wrote in the reign of one of the most powerful and wealthy times for ancient Israel, in the reign of Jeroboam II. It took **another 30 years** after Jeroboam II died before they went into captivity. It could be possible that we may yet have more time than we'd choose ourselves, but we must **STILL** be ready. He was a contemporary to Joel, Hosea and Jonah. Amos was a simple herdsman and a sycamore fruit gatherer. In the Bible, ISRAEL was divided into 2 kingdoms after Solomon's death – the northern 10 tribes were **not** the Jews, and were taken captive and disappeared from traditional history, and the **SOUTHERN KINGDOM** was the Kingdom of JUDAH. The Jews today are but a **PART** of Biblical Israel.

WHO IS MODERN DAY ISRAEL?

MODERN DAY ISRAEL TODAY—the one these prophecies were spoken about – is primarily **the USA and Britain**, but also includes many of the nations of NW Europe, Canada and Australia, New Zealand and parts of South Africa. In the broader sense it includes the NATION we *call* Israel – but that is more correctly the modern Kingdom of Judah. **You cannot read Genesis 49, which was a prophecy for what would befall Israel in the last days, and not recognize THE USA and BRITAIN** as being ancient double tribe of JOSEPH. It is – especially between them – the great power in the world today. Those verses in Genesis 49 cannot and do not find their fulfillment in the tiny nation called Israel today. *So when you read prophecies about “Israel” – think more of the USA and Britain – and not just the modern little nation of “Israel” in the Middle East!*

Amos 4:4-13 Today’s English Version, a modern paraphrase to make it easier to understand:

4 The Sovereign LORD says, "People of **Israel**, go to the holy place in Bethel and sin, if you must! Go to Gilgal and sin with all your might! Go ahead and bring animals to be sacrificed morning after morning, and bring your tithes every third day [*Hebrew can also mean “year”, or days – should be years, see Deut 14:28*].

Bethel – once with a holy history – had become a place of major sin when the first Jeroboam had made it the holy place of Israel, as an alternative to Jerusalem. Gilgal was once famous as the first place God had renewed His covenant with Israel after He miraculously brought them across the Jordan River, and they had their males all circumcised, as a symbol of being God’s holy people and entering into the covenant with God, as the new generation.

5 Go on and offer your bread in thanksgiving to God, and brag about the extra offerings you bring! This is the kind of thing you love to do.

NOW NOTICE in the next verse reveals WHO is the One sending the warning shots across our bow! Remember, even Joseph said that it was GOD who allowed him to be taken captive (Gen 50:19-20); in the book of JOB it says GOD sent the adversity to Job, even though used Satan to do it! (Job 42:11)

6 "**I** [verse 4 says this is God speaking] **was the one who brought famine** to all your cities, **yet you did not come back to me.** [that was the reason for the trials]

7 I kept it from raining when your crops needed it most. **I sent rain on one city**, but not on another. Rain fell on one field, but another field dried up. 8 **Weak with thirst, the people of several cities went to a city where they hoped to find water**, but there was not enough to drink. **Still you did not come back to me.**

9 "**I** sent a scorching wind to dry up your crops. The locusts ate up all your gardens and vineyards, your fig trees and olive trees. **Still** you did not come back to me.

10 "**I** sent a plague on you like the one I sent on Egypt. I killed your young men in battle and took your horses away. I filled your nostrils with the stink of dead bodies in your camps. **Still you did not come back to me.**

11 "**I** destroyed some of you as I destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. Those of you who survived were like a burning stick saved from a fire. **Still you did not come back to me,**" says the LORD.

12 "**So then, people of Israel, I am going to punish you. And because I am going to do this, get ready to face my judgment!**"

[verses 6-11 were just warning shots! The 'punishment' hasn't even started yet! THAT is how bad the "end time" will be – MUCH, MUCH worse than anything we've seen so far. MUCH, MUCH worse. Wake up America! Wake up everybody!]

13 God is the one who made the mountains and created the winds. He makes his thoughts known to man; he changes day into night. He walks on the heights of the earth. This is his name: the LORD God Almighty!

Amos 5:1-24 NKJV

5:1 A Lament for Israel

Hear this word which I take up against you, a lamentation, O house of Israel:

2 The virgin of Israel has fallen; She will rise no more.

She lies forsaken on her land; There is no one to raise her up.

3 For thus says the Lord GOD:

"The city that goes out by a thousand shall have a hundred left, And that which goes out by a hundred shall have ten left to the house of Israel."

[Is God saying only 10% of our population will be left alive? A tithe of people who will finally present themselves to God as His holy portion left, after His cleansing is done? I think it is saying that!

God now goes on to reveal what we need to do as a PRIORITY! Keep that in mind as you hear this entire sermon, THIS is the priority!]

WE NEED TO BE DOING SOMETHING SPIRITUALLY! THE FIRST STEP IN OUR PREPARATION FOR THE END TIME IS TOLD US RIGHT HERE:

Amos 5:4 A Call to Repentance

For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel:

"Seek ME and live; 5 But do not seek Bethel, Nor enter Gilgal, Nor pass over to Beersheba For Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, And Bethel shall come to nothing.

These were considered cities with a spiritual history and significance; "holy cities" if you will. Gilgal is where the Israelites of the new generation renewed their commitment to obey by being circumcised (Josh 4), *after* God showed His providence by the miraculous crossing of the Jordan and defeating 2 of their major enemies. God first redeems, then we understand enough to obey. The cross, repentance – then proof of that repentance by our obedience and good works. Anyway, Gilgal is where the tabernacle was set up while they conquered Canaan – then it moved to Shilo, then back to Gilgal before King David finally moved the tabernacle to Jerusalem.

Don't just go through the motions of *looking* righteous – that won't work! That's what God is saying here.

6 *Seek the LORD and live*, Lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph, And devour it, With no one to quench it in Bethel -- 7 You who turn justice to wormwood, And lay righteousness to rest in the earth!"

I'll jump on to verse 10, for time's sake...

10 They hate the one who rebukes in the gate, And they abhor the one who speaks uprightly.

[True! Anyone speaking for goodness is called a 'right wing wacko' and God denounces that attitude]

Amos 5:11 Therefore, because you tread down the poor and take grain taxes from him, Though you have built houses of hewn stone, [rich mansions! A time of prosperity] *Yet you shall not dwell in them; You have planted pleasant vineyards, But you shall not drink wine from them.* 12 **For I know your manifold transgressions** And your mighty sins: Afflicting the just and taking bribes; Diverting the poor from justice at the gate. 13 Therefore the prudent keep silent at that time, **For it is an evil time.**

Now in the next 2 verses, very succinctly are the things we need be doing, according to our Maker. AMERICA, listen! BRITAIN, awake from your slumber. CANADA, Australia, wake up! Everyone on this planet: bend your knees and bow your head as you listen to what our Maker says!

Amos 5:14 “**SEEK GOOD and not evil, That you may live; So the LORD God of hosts will be with you, As you have spoken.** 15 **HATE EVIL, LOVE GOOD; Establish justice in the gate.**

Then our God gives us a ray of hope, if we will do these things!

“It MAY be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph”.

Remember Nineveh? There’s a possibility we could have the same mercy, IF enough of us listen! What comes next is a warning NOT to want the “day of the Lord”. Interesting!

Amos 5:16 The Day of the LORD

Therefore the LORD God of hosts, the Lord, says this:

"There shall be **wailing** in all streets, And they shall say in all the highways, 'Alas! Alas! 'They shall call the farmer to mourning, And skillful lamenters to wailing. 17 In all vineyards there shall be wailing, For I will pass through you," says the LORD.

Amos 5:18 “**WOE TO YOU who DESIRE the Day of the Lord!** “
....we read this earlier, so I’ll skip now to verse 21.

21 "I hate, I despise your feast days, And I do not savor your sacred assemblies...”

As we come to the fall holydays, we should take warning from this. *God goes on to say in verses 22-24 that He wants a changed life – not just religion! “ I hate your religious rites without any real relationship with me”, is basically what God is saying here! I hate your holyday meetings that are mere form and not true worship!*

WHY would this topic even matter? www.lastdaysmystery.info/

Do I expect Christ to return at any time now? NOT YET. *I feel there still are too many things, at least from when I’m saying this in 2005, that are prophesied to happen first, which take some time.* I will cover those in another sermon. But I think we’re close. And if I’m wrong, it won’t hurt to have our relationship in place – which we should always have in place!! **The point of this sermon is the spiritual and physical preparation** we must have in place now, regardless of when Christ returns. For when He does, it will be at a time we don’t expect! THIS sermon is not about the 2nd coming of Christ per se.

Matthew 24:44 says JESUS will come at a time *when we DO NOT expect Him*. **Everyone is expecting Him right now or real soon, so He's not coming right now, in my opinion.** I don't think He will be here tonight or tomorrow or even next year – as I speak this in 2005. But He is coming, and soon – but there are some things which must happen first. Jesus told us what to expect in Matthew 24, Luke 21, the book of Revelation and the book of Daniel, in particular. We'll cover that topic in detail in future messages.

WILL GOD'S PEOPLE BE ON THE EARTH DURING THIS TIME OF TROUBLE?

READ my transcript notes – I'LL just summarize on audio for time's sake: God's people are NOT in heaven during the Great Tribulation. Some are protected from the Great Tribulation, and many are martyred. ***I now believe the 144,000 are God's people who are sealed after the Great Tribulation begins*** – folks that what the Bible says in **Rev 7:1-3**. WE are ALREADY sealed, so that CAN'T be us! (**See 2 Cor 1:22; Eph. 1:13; Eph 4:30**). The 144,000, I believe NOW, is *not* the total number of the church from Abel to the last person saved before Jesus returns – but is a SPECIFIC NUMBER delivered from the Great Tribulation, which had already started (**Rev. 6:9-11**). Many had already been martyred. If I'm wrong, we'll learn later. That piece of knowledge is not "salvational"; it's just speculation. It won't affect your salvation whether the 144,000 is the final number of the saved or not. Now I think the final number will be many times that in the end.

Revelation 7:2-4 "Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 3 saying, **"Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees TILL WE HAVE SEALED the servants** of our God on their foreheads." 4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed.."

But WE are already sealed!

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, **22 who also has sealed us** and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee."

The rapture is a relatively new doctrine. I believe Jesus comes back at the end of the Great Tribulation and at that time takes God's people briefly to heaven *first for the Marriage Supper* which probably will last several earth-months, and then we all return to rule the earth with Christ our Husband – but I believe the preponderance of scripture is that this happens *after* the resurrection, after our change into spirit beings, *after* the Great Tribulation, literally just a very short time before Christ returns permanently to stay on earth and to rule it for 1,000 years.

The typical *rapture* theory is that God's people are raptured to heaven *before* the time of Great trouble and they are all *delivered* from having to see or go through any of this trouble. It's a misunderstanding of **1 Thess 4:16-18**. They're already in heaven, according to the rapture theory, and then have to still come back down to be resurrected again – and it doesn't fit scripture.

The word "rapture" is not even in the Bible anywhere, except it is the LATIN Roman word for "caught up" to be with the Lord, found in 1 Thess. 4:17. But in the Greek, and in the English – you won't find the word "rapture" or "raptured" anywhere in the Bible, not even the paraphrases use it.

Like I said, I'll cover it in depth later, but here are a few verses to show God's people *will* be persecuted right to the very end, to the very return of Jesus Christ. The resurrection is at a time defined as "then comes the END" – but that's *after* the Great Tribulation.

- if we are all in heaven during troubling times on earth, why would the days have to be shortened for the elect's sake, if we're already protected? (**Matthew 24:22**)
- why does Rev. 12 make it clear that there is a body of believers, who are described as those who keep the commandments of God, who are chased and persecuted into the wilderness. The word "wilderness" means desolate place, without father or mother, etc. Heaven is hardly wilderness. And we'll be surrounded by our spiritual brothers, sisters and father and mother. So it *has* to be that we'll be on the earth.
- Why does **Daniel 7:21,25** clearly say that the great anti-Christ will be making war and prevailing against the holy ones of God until God comes to save them and the kingdoms are given to them. We'll perhaps go into that in a later sermon. If they were all in heaven, how could that be happening?
- WHY would **REV 7:14** speak of a great innumerable multitude who "*come out of the Great Tribulation*" and have made themselves white, cleansed, in the blood of the Lamb – if there are no people of God on earth *to* be in the Great Tribulation?

What I'm about to give now is my own contemplation of what I realize I must be doing – and am trying to do, and I'm just sharing what I've come to see needs to be happening in my own life. I preach to myself.

SO BACK TO THE TOPIC OF SPIRITUAL PREPARATION

REPENTANCE IS THE STARTING PLACE, as we've been saying in Amos and other places, of **BEING** ready, of having the right relationship. (Also hear my sermons on the web "New Creation", and ask for my free tape "Repenting of what You are")

Joel 2:12-17 As we read this, apply it to yourself.

"Now, therefore," says the LORD, "Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." 13 So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm. **14 Who knows if He will turn and relent [IT'S NOT TOO LATE to CHANGE the course its headed in, folks! (repeat v 14)],** And leave a blessing behind Him --A grain offering and a drink offering For the LORD your God?

15 Blow the trumpet in Zion, **Consecrate a fast [when was the last time you fasted?]** **Call a sacred assembly;** 16 Gather the people, Sanctify the congregation, Assemble the elders, Gather the children and nursing babes; Let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, And the bride from her dressing room. 17 **Let the priests, who minister to the LORD,** Weep between the porch and the altar; [NOW talk about praying for our nation!...] **Let them say, "Spare Your people, O LORD,** And do not give Your heritage to reproach, That the nations should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, "Where is their God?"

Remove anything that separates us from God. It's time to take an honest self-examination and face the sinful habits that bedevil us.

Common ones: PRIDE, selfishness, self-sufficiency (no need to know God)

The END TIME church is pictured as smug, asleep, naked – not clothed with God’s righteousness: the LAODECIANS. Yes, I believe most of us ARE Laodecians. If we listen now, we have time to repent and be right with God. You can read it yourself in Rev 3:14-22. God says they’re neither hot nor cold. Lukewarm. Asleep. Naked, blind, miserable.

REV 3:14-22

"And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write,

"These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:

15 "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 17

Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' -- and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked -- 18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be **clothed**, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your **eyes** with eye salve, that you may see. 19 *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.* 20 *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.* 21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

22 *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

2) PUT GOD FIRST; MAKE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM #1 IN YOUR LIFE

- **Priority: SEEK FIRST** the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Matt 6:33
 - God has to be *put* into first place. Hear my sermon on manna – Bible study. God wants us to be “seekers”. Study “seek” and you’ll have a great Bible study.

PUT REAL SIMPLY: IF we’re not praying and studying God’s word first thing every day – we are asleep spiritually. If we don’t pray and study every day, other things have been put *before* God, ahead of God, and those things have become our idols and distractions.

- **Seeking wrong priorities.** Nothing wrong with getting free of debt – but don’t put riches as a priority. For many, their dream life would be to be “independently wealthy”. But that’s a wrong priority. Life does not consist of the things you possess.

Matt 13:22 “Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.”

Luke 8:14 “Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity”

Is life to you all about “seizing the weekend” – and having as much as you can?

3) IT’S TIME TO SIMPLIFY OUR LIVES so we *have* more time for real priorities

Just one simple question:

What are the things using up our time, taking our focus and keeping us from doing the things we really need to be doing for spiritual and physical health?

Could be real simple: TV at night. Could be too much entertainment. Could be too many animals. Could be too many cars and the “stuff” of life. Could be too much focus on things and money. If you’re poor, you can still be distracted with “cares” of life.

Could be **POOR HEALTH** is taking your focus away. I preach to myself. I’ve had to do my own careful soul –searching.

Now, are you prepared to give some things up so you can do the right thing?

4) KEEPING WATCH, BEING ready is about watching our spiritual condition, staying awake spiritually -- more than it is watching world news.

So many verses tell us to BE ready, not just plan to *get* ready at the end

Matt 24:42-44 “**Watch** therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. 43 But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. 44 Therefore *you also BE ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*”

Take time yourself – homework – to study that phrase “**keep watch**” and see how it’s used elsewhere. It has to do more with being spiritually awake and alert, like a sentry on guard duty. All your senses tuned to what’s going on around you, like a sentry. It’s the Greek *gregoreuo*. Several times it is used in context of not letting yourself go to sleep spiritually.

I’ll have sermons and sermonettes soon on what it means to be spiritually clothed; to be spiritually awake. But in the meantime, I recommend you do your own study on those topics in the meantime. As you know, I see myself more as a facilitator, and less your teacher. I see myself more as your coach to get you doing more study yourself.

So “watching” is more about our spiritual state and being spiritually alert. But Jesus also said, when we see these things happening, know that His coming is very near, even at the door (Mark 13:29; Luke 21:31), so it’s clear we need to also be watching world events.

5) Very important: ACKNOWLEDGE OUR SAFETY AND PROTECTION IS FROM GOD
Psalm 57:1-3

“Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me!

For my soul trusts IN YOU; And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge,
Until these calamities have passed by.

2 I will cry out to God Most High, To God who performs all things for me.

3 He shall send from heaven and save me; He reproaches the one who would swallow me up.

Selah. God shall send forth His mercy and His truth”

For years many of God’s people have believed we will be taken to “the **place of safety**”. I still hope that’s correct. **But we must not seek a PLACE for our safety – but GOD HIMSELF.** Let me repeat that. We must not seek a place for our safety; **our faith and even our protection is not in a place, but in God.** Our faith is *not* in a place called “the rock” (Petra), but in GOD who *is* our Rock. Then God will provide the means for safety where, how, and when HE chooses for each of us – whether it is wherever we are, or whether it is in one literal place of final training and safety, or whether it is multiple places, or none of the above, **OR whether – NOW GET THIS – God even wills and chooses to let us be among those who get to die for Him, as He died for us.**

Yes, you heard me right. I said “get to” die for Him. That’s an honor. Count it all joy, leap for joy when you are called to suffer for Him, who suffered for you (**James 1:2-3; Matt. 5:11-12**). That won’t mean that we’re somehow a lesser Christian because we die for Him. JESUS died. Paul, Peter, James, Stephen also all died for God. Isaiah, tradition says, was sawn in two, alive. Timothy was clubbed to death. *So what an honor it would be to be counted worthy to be part of such a select group of martyrs!*

Some of God’s people have made “the place of safety” a virtual god. Some seek the place of safety more than they seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness. That is idolatry to seek a place, and not the source of safety – GOD Himself. Check my transcript for more scriptures on this – which I’ll just rattle through quickly on the audio.

Psalm 18:1-3 “I will love You, O LORD, my strength. **2 The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust;** My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. **3 I will call upon the LORD**, who is worthy to be praised; *So shall I be saved* from my enemies.”

Psalm 71:1-5 *“In You, O LORD, I put my trust;* Let me never be put to shame. **2 Deliver me in Your righteousness, and cause me to escape;** Incline your ear to me, and save me. **3 Be my strong refuge,** To which I may resort **continually;** You have given the commandment to save me, *For You are my rock and my fortress.* **4 Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, Out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man. 5 For You are my hope, O Lord GOD; You are my trust from my youth.”**

Psalm 91:1-10 is also a wonderful passage

“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

Are you dwelling in close relationship with Him? Are you under the shadow of the Almighty? To be in someone’s shadow is to be close enough to have the shadow affect you! Read the rest of short chapter on your own. It’s very encouraging!

PART 2: Some PHYSICAL PREPARATION is also PRUDENT

Now let’s look at some obvious physical things you should be doing. The emphasis should ALWAYS be on trusting in God, but God also created a brain and a head for us so we can do certain things too.

When **Joseph** knew a worldwide famine was coming, and that it would last seven years, in the seven plentiful years he had, what did he know? He saved up. He prepared. He didn’t just relax and say, “The Lord will provide”. The Lord was providing! *Seven* plentiful years!

If you’re in your plentiful years now, by comparison, and believe me—we *are* – we should be doing the same thing.

We must not rely on our physical preparation to save us. Neither do I recommend saving up a year’s supply of food because the neighbors will find out and you’ll be killed for your food. I’m talking about **preparations to get you through a few weeks** until such time as emergency aid can come and after a few days of disaster, we will all have to rely on God for *continued* sustenance and provisions. **So don’t count on your own preparation to deliver you, but it is still PRUDENT to**

have some preparation made. In the end though, when it **REALLY** hits, GOD will have to provide for us and we'll have to have the relationship established with Him so He recognizes us as HIS. *We've got to quit fooling around spiritually, playing church, and not really changing and putting God first.*

We count on God for the big picture, but having an **EMERGENCY SUITCASE** ready to fly out of your house already packed, IS PRUDENT. We have ours packed, one always kept in my car in fact. JUST DO IT. Get it done! Even emergency preparedness centers advocate that! Its' just common sense. *I'm NOT referring to the time when its so urgent we're not even supposed to go back to our houses to get anything.* I'm talking about emergencies that are less than that. Calamities will become ever more frequent and severe – and those are the times an emergency suitcase could really help. *But just before the GREAT Tribulation, no supplies and emergency suitcase will help you! Read it for yourself in Matt 24:15-22.* We'll have to totally rely at that time solely on God.

Yes, **ELIJAH** was fed by ravens (**1 Kings 17:4-7**). Yes, next the widow's cruse of oil never ran out (vs. 8-16). Yes, the Israelites were fed bread from heaven – manna. Yes, a huge rock was split in half and out came water for Israel. Jesus multiplied the loaves and fish to feed thousands. That same Jesus can still do things like that. And we may indeed be placed miraculously in a place of safety.

YOU AND I WILL HAVE TO BELIEVE in times like that, or it won't happen!

You may want to hear my 3 –part series on LIVING BY FAITH.

God can do the same again for *us* in the long haul. We will have to believe, brethren – or we won't see these answers in the day-to-day miracles. And living by faith *starts now*, every day, so it's a way of life when we really need it during times of disaster. There should be a PEACE about the people of God.

But **GET A DISASTER SUITCASE PACKED AND READY TO SNAP UP AND LEAVE**

There are different levels of disasters. The time of the very worse trouble, we may not even have time to go home. Then there are also disasters we can see coming – like a hurricane. In those cases, if you can grab a pre-assembled suitcase, some clothes, some cash and run – you can perhaps avoid the gridlock that happens if you are half an hour or an hour delayed.

I carry a big plastic tub in my car full of **emergency things, which I'll list at the end of the sermon.** Things like a **small zippered Bible**, pens, a few cans of food, knife, hammer and other tools, tarp, garbage sacks, jacket, hat, candles, matches, cigarette lighters for making fire, flashlight, batteries, small radio, toilet paper, even fishing lines and hooks, jackets, gloves, trail mix, energy food, water filters/purifiers; some cash, a list of emergency phone numbers and family phone numbers, some cards or reading for the children, children's emergency supplies, and so on.

Plus in one spot next to the emergency suitcase, we have some important, bigger items ready to grab if we have time – sleeping bags, propane stove and fuel, small tent and pegs/poles; drinking water; perhaps extra gas can. And that's all assuming we can use the car. If we have to just carry what we can, then of course we do the best we can, relying totally on God. *But note this: having some physical preparation like Joseph did, is still relying on God, but also using the head he put on our shoulders! Being prepared does not mean you lack faith!*

LIST OF EMERGENCY phone numbers, including family, friends, doctor, minister, relatives.

Make copies and leave one in your glove compartment of your car, and MAIL a list also to your family members.

Besides that, we've prepared an *additional* SUITCASE of additional emergency packing – for longer stays.

If you can afford it, try to buy an **EMERGENCY LOCK BOX** that is FIREPROOF AND WATERPROOF – for lists of phone numbers, copies of all your important documents.

Mail an extra set of keys to your car and home to a relative in a different state.

PLAN to have AN ASSEMBLY POINT, if possible. And if NOT, WHOM TO CONTACT TO LET KNOW WHERE YOU ARE. Load all the phone numbers into some cell phones now.

MY POINT: HAVE A PLAN ready to roll. It will take some time ahead of time. But please do it.

LET'S GET OUR HEALTH IN TIP TOP SHAPE, as best we can in the time we have remaining; while we can.

The healthy will withstand the coming disasters better: will better cope with stress, with infection, be able to move more quickly, think more clearly, and cope better. Check the transcript for specific things – eating better – and **less junk food, losing weight, exercising more, sleeping more.** Again, it's just a matter of doing it. Our bodies are the temple of God's spirit. If you **smoke** – stop. Smoking hurts us all. Find out what's causing **stress** in your life, and do your best to eliminate that stress. STRESS will kill many of us. Stress increases the risk for cancer, heart attack and stroke.

I'm terribly **overweight** and so are many of you. I was asked what shape I was in, and I replied, "round". But that's no longer funny. Obesity does not glorify God, who dwells in our bodies as His temple. Obesity causes or aggravates lots of other problems, and increases the risk for such problems as joint pain, joint problems, high blood pressure, diabetes, heart attack, stroke, cancer, sleep apnea, and a host of other problems.

Let's **lose weight** if we're obese. As of this date I've lose 16 lbs – and many more to go. Let's finally start doing what we have to do to lose the weight. Many of us eat far too many sweets, sugars, simple carbohydrates, processed foods, junk food, fast food – and we're making ourselves unhealthy.

DIABETES is a looming disaster. Losing weight – all by itself – could help the diabetes disappear.

If you're on **medications**, perhaps try to find natural alternatives. Most medications have possible side effects. Ask your doctor if you still need the medications you're on.

GET YOUR FINANCES IN ORDER NOW WHILE YOU CAN

Here's what I'd recommend FINANCIALLY. Brethren, I find God's people often very ignorant in terms of financial knowledge. Many are in terrible debt. Many have no savings at all. It's one thing to be truly poor – but another to be poor because of mismanagement. But there are many scriptures that talk about financial responsibility, and one day I'll talk more at length on it.

- **Be sure to be TITHING.** God commands it. I'll give a message some time on that. If you want God's blessings financially, we have to quit robbing God.

- **Be willing to share what you have – and God will bless you back**
- **PLEASE GET INSURANCES in place - - full replacement insurance on your house; I also carry an UMBRELLA policy; if any threat of flooding – FLOOD insurance.** I do believe having an insurance policy is a godly thing to do, as it allows funds for your family if something happens to you, or your house.
- **HAVE A TRADITIONAL MORTGAGE, if you can't pay it off** – not the dangerous new “interest only” mortgages. You’ll be REAL sorry you have those in the long run. If you’re planning to stay in your home for more than a few years, don’t have an A.R.M. either – adjustable rate mortgage. It will cost you much more in the end. I’d recommend the 15 year mortgage or extra payment on principal 1-2x a year at least to cut down the principal dramatically. If the house is paid off, though it goes against some advisors out there, I think that has to be a better deal all around when the times get really rough, when we may not have a job or income. But still, our faith and reliance must always be in God ultimately.
- **GET OUT OF DEBT.** Credit unions and banks often have seminars on how to get out of debt. There are books you can buy, and articles on the web you can download. **The Bible tells us not to be in debt, not to owe anything (Rom. 13:8).** In our modern culture, we tend to have a mortgage and a car payment, but if you can – get rid of any other debts, and even those if you can. And don’t take the foolish and unchristian thought of racking up debts now, “because when I flee for safety I won’t have to pay them off”. That is a form of stealing, is not of God, is unchristian. Can I make it any plainer?

I was terribly in debt for years, running my own business. It almost always takes a few years to set up a new business, running on borrowed money in the beginning. That’s what we did , more or less, but now – except for our house and 1 car payment – I owe nothing. With a lot of hard work and discipline, we’ve been able to pay off the credit cards. I pray you do too.

- Build up a 3-6 months **EMERGENCY SAVINGS**. **Cash or savings you can use if there is NO money coming in for 3 or more months.**
- **ADDITIONAL SAVINGS** and retirement funds if you can, beyond that emergency fund
 - **TIME is your biggest ally.** If you’re in your 20’s, 30’s, even just \$30-\$50 a month invested wisely means you’ll have savings when you are in your 60’s and 70’s.
 - Means **CURTAILING SPENDING**
 - Analyze what you’re doing that is **wasting money**- - such as frequent Starbucks, unnecessary trips (wasted gas), frivolous spending, spur-of-the-moment spending, etc.
 - I’m sure you can figure out all kinds of other ways to watch your money and be good stewards of the funds God has allowed you to manage.

Everything I’ve just mentioned above financially are things we have already done ourselves, or are doing. These things won’t save you – but it can sure make a disaster more bearable when you can rebuild, or when you have emergency funds, or a plan of action, or have no debt.

I’d also recommend – for what its worth – *everyone* should now apply for a valid **PASSPORT, for everyone in your household, if you don’t already have one.** Who knows? It can’t hurt. Please take my advice on that point.

BRETHREN – MOST IMPORTANT: spend more time than ever getting to KNOW GOD, and be in HIS WORD. THEN, have some physical preparation in place also – and then RELY ON GOD after that to help us all get through what is going to be a very, very rough ride – when the final 3 or 4 years starts, just before the return of Christ.

God bless you. Be watchful, be ready. This is your brother in Christ, Philip Shields. :)

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