

# Blessings in the New Covenant

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Brethren, throughout the history of mankind, one of the subjects that has been particularly difficult for many people to deal with over the years is the issue of “Why do bad things happen to good people?” Because, if you think about it, just as human beings, we have kind of an inherent logic we tend to look at the world through. To our minds, it makes sense if someone is an honest, kind, nice person, is giving to others and just generally what we would consider to be a good person. We think, well, it's fair that good things should happen to that person because they're just a good person. Whereas if a person's kind of the opposite, you know, they're just kind of mean and nasty to other people and they're dishonest and they steal from other people and they're abusive and such. We think, well, bad things should probably happen to that person because they're just a bad person. That's just kind of the logic that makes sense to us.

What we kind of struggle with is the issue of when really good people that we think are kind of upstanding, honest, just likable, nice people have really horrible bad things happen in their lives. Oftentimes people question the very existence of a loving creator God over that particular issue. You oftentimes hear people question, “How can there be a loving, caring God if He allows all these horrible things to happen to good people?” And even in the Church of God, I've seen situations where people really kind of struggle with that subject.

Several years ago, I was at a Church of God sponsored picnic, and there was a bunch of us sitting around talking. One lady in the group was sharing with us her struggle because she had a close friend that she knew very well and had known for many years that was struggling with an ugly battle with cancer. I mean, just having a really ugly time with it. This lady was struggling with the subject because she said she knew this woman. She said, “She's a good woman. She's a good wife. She's a good mother to her children. She's just an overall good person.” But the way she stated her struggle really kind of gives the introduction to where I want to go with the sermon today. Because she asked the question to us, “I struggle with this because doesn't God want to bless His children with good things? Doesn't He want to do good things as a loving parent to His children?”

The reason I point that out is it speaks to the definition of blessings. Because our definition of blessings as physical human beings is things that take away pain and suffering out of our lives and give us pleasure and enjoyment. That's how we tend to define a blessing. But what we need to understand is God can have two distinctly different definitions of blessings. What I mean by that is, if we look at how He defines a blessing in an Old Covenant relationship with mankind versus how He defines a blessing in a New Covenant relationship with mankind, they're kind of distinctly different. And if we're to properly understand His plan and how He works with us as Christians and particularly how He'll work with mankind in the future when He begins to call

everyone else, it's important that we understand this distinction. So, if you'd like a title for this sermon, it's

### Blessings in the New Covenant

Because as we're going to see today, there's kind of a distinct difference in how this subject is defined depending upon what covenant you're talking about. Oftentimes when we think of the differences between the Old and New Covenants, one of the obvious things we think of is in the Old Covenant they had a sacrificial system and a Levitical Priesthood and a physical temple and things of that nature. Well, in the New Covenant Church, we don't have any of that. And of course, the Holy Spirit and salvation is offered to mankind in the New Covenant, and that's different than the old. All those things are very accurate, but oftentimes we miss the fact that the very definition of how the Bible defines a blessing is different depending upon which covenant you're talking about.

So, to understand this, let's turn over first of all to Deuteronomy 28. This is a chapter we oftentimes refer to as the "blessings and cursings chapter". This is God kind of articulating His relationship with ancient Israel and what they should expect if they were faithful in obeying His commandments and doing their best to strive to do that and how things would go for them if they were rebellious, and they ignored Him and disregarded His commandments. What I want you to notice as we read through this is how it defines a blessing is how we typically, as physical human beings, would define a blessing. In other words, things that take away the pain and suffering out of our life and give us pleasure and enjoyment. You know, make our physical lives enjoyable and something that gives us joy and enjoyment in our lives. So, let's start off reading in Deuteronomy 28 in verse 1.

**Deu 28:1** *"Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. 2) And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God: 3) "Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country. 4) "Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. 5) "Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. 6) "Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out. 7) "The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways. 8) "The LORD will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you. 9) "The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways. 10) Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you. 11) And the LORD will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of*

*your ground, in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you.*

*12) The LORD will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. 13) And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them. 14) So you shall not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, to the right or the left, to go after other gods to serve them.” (NKJV)*

And notice in particular when I mentioned in verse 13, “you shall be above only and not beneath”. In other words, this whole description here of what blessings are, is again, what we looking at it from a physical point of view as physical human beings would expect. Well, good people, they should receive good things. You think life should go good for them if they're honorable, honest, kind, hardworking, good people. Well, then life should go good for those folks because they've been good people. That's how we tend to think. That's exactly what He's promising them. Now let's notice here the list of curses that would come with disobedience. But notice all these bad things, they're associated with disobedience. Now, think about the fact that this doesn't say that even though you've been good and obeyed these bad things are going to happen to you anyway, and you're going to have to endure through it. That's not how it's presented. It's presented that these bad things happen to you if you behave badly. Now pick up in verse 15,

**Deu 28:15** *“But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: 16) “Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country. 17) “Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. 18) “Cursed shall be the fruit of your body and the produce of your land, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. 19) “Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out. 20) “The LORD will send on you cursing, confusion, and rebuke in all that you set your hand to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, because of the wickedness of your doings in which you have forsaken Me. 21) The LORD will make the plague cling to you until He has consumed you from the land which you are going to possess. 22) The LORD will strike you with consumption, with fever, with inflammation, with severe burning fever, with the sword, with scorching, and with mildew; they shall pursue you until you perish. 23) And your heavens which are over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you shall be iron. 24) The LORD will change the rain of your land to powder and dust; from the heaven it shall come down on you until you are destroyed. 25) “The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them; and you shall become troublesome to all the kingdoms of the earth. 26) Your carcasses shall be food for all the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and no one shall frighten them away. 27) The LORD will*

*strike you with the boils of Egypt, with tumors, with the scab, and with the itch, from which you cannot be healed. 28) The LORD will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of heart. 29) And you shall grope at noonday, as a blind man gropes in darkness; you shall not prosper in your ways; you shall be only oppressed and plundered continually, and no one shall save you. 30) "You shall betroth a wife, but another man shall lie with her; you shall build a house, but you shall not dwell in it; you shall plant a vineyard, but shall not gather its grapes. 31) Your ox shall be slaughtered before your eyes, but you shall not eat of it; your donkey shall be violently taken away from before you, and shall not be restored to you; your sheep shall be given to your enemies, and you shall have no one to rescue them. 32) Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people, and your eyes shall look and fail with longing for them all day long; and there shall be no strength in your hand. 33) A nation whom you have not known shall eat the fruit of your land and the produce of your labor, and you shall be only oppressed and crushed continually." (NKJV)*

Notice if you're disobedient and you've disregard God and you're directly sinning, He said you should just expect life to go bad. And notice all of this fits into exactly our physical view of what blessings should be like. What life we would think physically should be like. Good people, they should receive good things. And bad people, those that are mean and dishonest and steal and hurt other people, well, they should have bad things happen to them because they're bad people. That makes sense to us.

But we also need to understand when salvation is put on the table, the game completely changes. Because what I want you to understand -- think about this from the deal that God was making with ancient Israel. As we know, they get their chance at salvation later in the fulfillment of the fall Holy Days. But just look at it from the perspective of what was happening at the time. What is He offering them? He's offering them a covenant that if they continually obey Him faithfully, He's going to make their physical life pleasant and enjoyable for them.

Now, if salvation is not on the table, and this physical life is all that you have being offered to you, what's the definition of the best deal you can possibly get? Well, that's to spend as much of your life, as much time as possible, having pleasure and enjoyment, and as little time as possible having pain and suffering in your life. That's exactly the deal, He was offering them. Because again, salvation is not part of the equation. But once salvation enters the equation, now the game changes completely and the definition of a blessing changes completely. Because notice here, there was nothing stated here in what was defined as a blessing. Counting it as a blessing when life is hard and it's painful and it's a struggle, that's just not in this. You know, all of this was if you faithfully obey, life's going to be wonderful. It's going to feel good. It's going to be enjoyable. It's just when you're sinful and you've been rebellious, that's when it's going to hurt.

But now let's notice how the New Testament talks about blessings. Because it talks about it in a way very different than this and very different than how our physical minds

like to think of blessings. Turn over with me -- just to notice several scriptures here -- to Matthew 5. What I want you to see here is there's a totally different take on the subject of blessings when we look in the New Testament. And again, it's an idea of defining blessings in a way that our physical minds tend to rebel from because it's not how we look at blessings. Look at Matthew 5 and verse 10.

**Matt 5:10** *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11) "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12) Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."* (NKJV)

Now just think about that. We don't typically as physical human beings think, "Wow! My name is being dragged through the mud, and everyone is saying bad things about me and just painting me as an evil, horrible person and stabbing me in the back. I am so blessed. Isn't life wonderful?" No, that's not how we look at it. We think, "Man, what did I do to deserve this? This is totally unjust." We don't look at that as a blessing. But notice He's framing it like that. But why is it ultimately a blessing? We are going to see it's about testing our character because the ultimate payoff is again, salvation. When salvation is part of the equation, the rules of the game change completely. Let's notice that there's multiple scriptures in the Bible that are very consistent with this, and we're just going to scratch the surface today. Turn over to Luke 6. We'll see numerous statements like this where it directly calls things blessings that we as physical human beings don't tend to think of as a blessing. It's Luke 6 in verse 21.

**Luke 6:21** *"Blessed are you who hunger now, For you shall be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, For you shall laugh. 22) Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake. 23) Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets."* (NKJV)

It's again, defining things as blessings that we don't tend to think of as blessings. But again, it turns around and refers to this reward in heaven, the reward of salvation. That's what evens the scales. That's what makes this ultimately worth it in the long run. And again, it's an important part of the puzzle to understand because not only is this important to understanding in our lives today, and just understanding the world as we look at it, it's also very critically important to understand how God's going to work with the rest of mankind in the future. Because oftentimes we kind of throw away these fundamental rules when we create our picture of how God's going to work with mankind in the future. But we'll get to that more in detail here in a minute. But now turn over to James 5. Let's notice here something referred to as a blessing that is an example that we just would not think of as a blessing. We would think of this example as a nightmare. It's James 5 and verse 10.

**James 5:10** *“My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. 11) Indeed we count them blessed who endure.”* (NKJV)

Now let's notice who is cited as an example of being blessed with their endurance.

*“You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.”* (NKJV)

Now how many of us would look at the life of Job and think, “Wow! What a blessing!” The guy lost everything he owned in one single day. Had all of his children killed. Wound up covered in boils and suffering with sleep deprivation and being surrounded by people who are just attacking him and defaming him. Who thinks of that as, “Oh wow, I'm really blessed going through this?” No, we think of that as a nightmare. You know, as something you would just never in a million years want to go through. Like man, if I could go through my life and skip that experience, I'd prefer to avoid that one. That's how we would look at it. But this refers to it as a blessing.

The reason is again, it's referring to “the end intended by the Lord”. Because again, when salvation is on the table, the rules of the game completely change. And the way that we look at things has to completely change. Because now you have to factor in what's required for salvation. And again, the ultimate reward of salvation, because that evens the scales in a way that regular physical logic just can't account for. And that's very important to understand when we're looking at life. That's the fundamental key to kind of making all of this make sense. And we need to understand as well that this is fundamentally a requirement for salvation.

Because sometimes we tend to look at this like, “Well, yeah, the Apostles and the Prophets and, you know, some of those “unlucky” people in the New Testament had to suffer and get killed and everything, but God wants the rest of us to have an easier time.” We tend to kind of rationalize that kind of logic in our mind, sometimes whether we even articulate it or not, as we're going to see, and this is a quote I'll get to later in this sermon, the reason we do that is not because the Bible supports any of that. It's because it's emotionally satisfying for us as human beings. Because as we're going to see, oftentimes we cling to things that are emotionally satisfying even when it doesn't match the Bible at all. But let's just notice here that when salvation is on the table, enduring suffering and then successfully enduring through it is a flat out stated requirement for salvation. It is fundamental to the calling of a New Covenant Christian. So, let's turn over to Romans 8. And we'll see here in verse 16.

**Rom 8:16** *“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17) and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ,”* (NKJV)

Now notice the rest of the sentence.

*“if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.” (NKJV)*

In other words, if we want to be glorified together. If we want to receive the resurrection to eternal life and become a God being and be able to reign with Christ. Suffering is part of the equation. It's one of the requirements we have to be willing to face and to go through to obtain that reward. It's a packaged deal. As we're going to see here, and this is true not only for us today as Firstfruits, we're going to see later in the sermon, this is true for everyone called after the return of Christ as well. There is no such thing as having your cake and eating it too. In other words, the idea that you're going to have a comfortable, easy life without having to suffer through hard times and difficult trials, and yet you're going to slide into the Kingdom of God and get rewarded with salvation too. That's a nice sounding idea. It's very emotionally satisfying.

*It does NOT match the Bible.*

And we're going to get to that here in a minute. But turn with me over to 1 Peter 2. What I want you to see here is it's directly stated that dealing with suffering is a requirement for salvation. Not suffering that we brought upon ourselves because we sinned. We were foolish, and we made bad decisions, and we kind of had the consequences coming because we didn't behave too well. We didn't make too wise decisions, and when the negative consequences come our way, well, we can't really complain because we had it coming.

That happens and oftentimes we do suffer for those reasons, but the Bible directly tells us that part of our calling is patiently enduring through and successfully enduring through suffering, even when it has nothing to do with we sinned or we made bad decisions and now we're facing the consequences. It's patiently enduring through it when we're facing hard trials and persecution. and we didn't do anything to bring it upon ourselves. You know, it's not a self-inflicted situation. Now pick up here in 1 Peter 2 and verse 19.

**1 Peter 2:19** *“For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.” (NKJV)*

In other words, suffering when it's not a result of you were sinning. You just made dumb decisions, and these are the natural consequences of your actions. Because again, as carnal human beings, a lot of the times when we suffer, we brought it upon ourselves because we sinned. We just made dumb decisions that we shouldn't have done, and we had to learn the hard way. But what this is talking about is facing hard times of persecution or suffering that isn't a direct result of the natural consequences of our sins or our bad decisions. Now pick up in verse 20.

*“20) For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. 21) For to this you were called,” (NKJV)*

Notice it is fundamental to our calling. It's not an exception to the rule. It's not something that just a few people have to deal with. Just those unlucky individuals who happened to get that lot in life. No this is fundamental to being a New Covenant Christian. It's not an if, it's a when.

*"because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:" (NKJV)*

Now think about how Christ suffered. It wasn't because of His sins. He never sinned. He never did anything where, as a natural result, He was facing the consequences. No, He suffered severely in spite of the fact He lived a perfect life. Now pick up in verse 22.

*"22) 'Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth'; 23) who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24) who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. 25) For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." (NKJV)*

So, you can see that fundamental to our calling is being willing to face trials and persecution. Being willing to suffer. You know, that's fundamental to what we go through. And what we're going to see here is even directly being persecuted is something that all Christians face. To notice this turnover to 2 Timothy 3. This is 2 Timothy 3 in verse 12.

**2 Tim 3:12** *"Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." (NKJV)*

Notice it is an all-encompassing statement. It does not allow for any wiggle room whatsoever. It doesn't say, "Oh, we're just referring to Christ and the Apostles and those individuals in the Bible that had to be martyred and persecuted for their beliefs. But everybody else, God's going to be kind to everybody else and you'll have an easy slide." He doesn't say, "I'm just referring to the Firstfruits because everybody else in mankind gets an easy slide in the Kingdom of God."

*That's NOT what it says!*

It says ALL who want to live Godly in Christ will suffer persecution. In other words, it's everybody. There's only one name by which we can be saved. So, there's no such thing as pursuing salvation and you're not having to accept Christ as your savior. It doesn't matter if you're called as a Firstfruit or if you're called after the return of Christ. Everybody's got to accept Christ's sacrifice and follow His example. It's saying that everybody's going to get persecuted. Well, if you think about that, sometimes we limit the definition of persecution in our minds. We tend to think of persecution as that's like what the Apostle Paul faced. You know, being beaten up, thrown in prison, and people



trying to stone you. The government or lynch mobs coming after you to attack you. And we think, "Well, I've known tons of Christians in my life that lived their entire Christian life and died in the faith, and they never faced that kind of thing." Well, that's not exactly what this is referring to in terms of persecution. Because yes, that is persecution, but we need to think of this a little broader because we need to understand who the persecutor is and what is it that we really struggle against in our Christian life. You see, the persecutor is Satan. Turn over to Ephesians 6 and we'll see here where the Bible directly tells us -- it defines for us -- who the persecutor is.

**Eph 6:12** *"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."* (NKJV)

In other words, the real battle is facing the persecution from Satan and his demons and that spiritual force that's against us. Because that can not only move to bring physical things in our lives to cause difficult circumstances or other people being hostile or treating us badly because we're trying to follow God, but then there's that constant spiritual bombardment trying to tempt us to sin. You know, trying to get us to turn away from God and to become discouraged or to get rebellious or just to play upon our weaknesses. That's something that we all have to overcome. See, that's the persecution he's referring to. That's something that everyone has to overcome in their day of salvation to be able to make it in the Kingdom of God.

But notice again here that it doesn't give an exception. The reason I point that out is about 14 years ago, I came to start really questioning the subject of our view of prophecy, particularly as it pertains to the rest of mankind and their path to salvation. The reason I mention that is about 14 years ago I did a couple of sermons on the book of Job. In researching the sermons, I really started to see just how fundamental -- particularly throughout the New Testament -- the whole subject of enduring through harsh trials is to our calling. It's a fundamental tool that God uses to not only test our faithfulness in Him, but to build His character in us. Striving against those trials is what really builds our character and challenges us. And it's also what tests our loyalty and our faithfulness to Him. There's just an absolute mountain of scriptures all throughout the New Testament that all talk about this and they all match each other. They all agree. They make these all-encompassing dogmatic statements that apply to everyone.

I started looking at that and saying, "Something's wrong". What I meant by that is from the time I was a child growing up, I was taught this idea that once Christ returns and the majority of mankind gets their opportunity for salvation, well, for them it's just an easy, comfortable slide in the Kingdom of God and they don't have to face Satan and it's just all warm and fuzzy. I started realizing you have to kind of gut the New Testament to get that idea to work. Because where are the scriptures that would define this easy path to salvation? Or any scriptures that even allow for an exception, let alone the majority of mankind, being an exception to these dogmatically stated rules. Oftentimes when I bring this up to not only long-term members, but even a number of other ministers, I would kind of bring this up and say, "Okay, how do we deal with this? There's got to be an

issue here. Obviously, we all have to face Satan. Maybe that's the reason why he's released again." *Because it is the reason why he's released again after the Millennium.*

But when I would bring this up, I found that the counter argument was always emotion. People would never come to me with the Bible and say, "Well, here's all the scriptures that define how God's going to build our character without having to face this." No one ever did that. They always just said, "Oh, God's love and He wants people to feel good. And love is about having an easy, comfortable life." Again, that matches with our idea of what a blessing is as physical human beings. It doesn't match the New Testament. So, we have to understand when we read dogmatic statements like 2 Timothy 3:12, because that was my favorite scripture in pointing this out to people. I'm like, there's no wiggle room there. It's all who want to live Godly in Christ Jesus are going to face this. It's an all-encompassing statement. It doesn't allow for any wiggle room. There's no way around it. Well, we have to define our view of the future and how God's going to work with the rest of mankind in line with foundational doctrine of the New Testament. We can't gut the New Testament to come up with an idea just because it feels good.

But this also helps us understand how God works with us today as well. Because again, this helps us understand why a loving God would allow bad things to happen to good people. Because it accomplishes a fundamental purpose. It builds His character in us. That's how He actually develops His mind in us. This is a fundamental tool to do that. So, turn over to James 1 and we'll briefly look at this. It's James 1 and verse 2.

**James 1:2** *"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,"* (NKJV)

Again, that's easy to say and very hard to do. You know, I don't naturally think like that. I'm sure all of you out there hearing this have the same human nature as well. When life's going bad and it's painful and it hurts, we don't think, "Oh boy, I'm so blessed! I find this joyful!" You know, we're like, "God, could you please take these hard problems away? I'm not enjoying this." That's how we look at it as physical human beings. But what this is telling us is to see that as joy. Well, why? Let's just keep reading.

*"3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4) But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."* (NKJV)

Notice what it's getting at is that's how God's character is developed in us. We don't enjoy the experience, but again, it's a fundamental tool that helps accomplish His purpose, which is to develop His mind and character in us. Because oftentimes people think "A loving God wouldn't do that! A loving God, He makes everything wonderful and peaceful and, you know, makes everything feel good for you." Well, it's a fundamental misunderstanding of what love is. Because as I like to put it, Godly love is not based on the question, "Does it feel good?" In other words, is it enjoyable to our physical mind to our physical definitions? Does it make my life, you know, feel good and positive from a human perspective? Godly love is defined by the question, "Does it do good?" In other words, what does it ultimately accomplish in the long run?

Because we need to pay attention to how God defines His love. Because I'm sure as a Christian, you're probably familiar with the term "agape". You know, the Greek word for Godly love. You know that that's how God sums up His character. That God is agape. That He is love. That defines His very nature and mind. That's the mind that we as Christians are supposed to be developing in our lives. But let's notice how He defines it. Turn over to 1 Corinthians 13, a chapter we oftentimes refer to as "the love chapter". Let's read the first several verses here.

**1 Cor 13:1** *"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. 2) And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3) And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing."* (NKJV)

Now this is telling us how we should look at love. Yes, the most important thing we can develop in our minds is God's love. To think like He does and to behave like He does. But now let's notice the next verse and the first statement that is made to define Godly love.

*"4) Love suffers long and is kind;"* (NKJV)

Now think about that. How does one develop the ability to suffer long and be kind if one doesn't have to first suffer long? By definition, wouldn't that be a requirement? That's just fundamental to how it works. Again, that's oftentimes not how our physical minds want to look at it, because we look at love as, well, that's things that make life feel good and enjoyable from a physical perspective. No, it's about what ultimately does good in the long run. That's what really is important, and that's how God looks at it. See, that is the factor that has to be put into all of this to understand why God would allow painful, difficult things to happen to good people, and not only allow it, but absolutely require it. To require that, to be His children, to make it into His Kingdom, that we're going to have to be people willing to endure bad things happening, even when you've been good, and take it with a good attitude, and positively endure through it.

Because that understanding that salvation is being offered -- ultimately at the end of this movie -- that's what changes this whole definition. That's what changes the entire picture. And that's what makes it all worth it in the end. Because the Apostle Paul himself even tells us, if salvation weren't offered at the end, given the terms of the New Covenant and how it really works in line with the scriptures that I've just read here. You know, if you're called to a commitment and a calling that requires you to suffer, requires you to be persecuted, requires you to take suffering that you didn't deserve with a good attitude, if you're not offered salvation in the end, you kind of got ripped off.

That's exactly what we're going to read here in just a minute of what Paul directly says. Because if you think about it, if you're just looking at this physical life, and this is why people oftentimes question the existence of a loving creator God when they look at the

world around us, and they say, okay, "Well, good people oftentimes suffer horribly when they didn't deserve it." And they look at this and go, "Well, that can't be right! There can't be a loving God if He allows this to happen!" Well, if you don't understand, the ultimate purpose is salvation and that that's part of the equation of what God is doing here. That's what makes it all make sense. So, turn over to 1 Corinthians 15. I want you to notice where Paul himself directly says, if salvation is not offered, if the resurrection to eternal life was not in the equation, then as a New Covenant Christian, you got ripped off. This is a bad deal if there's not that reward at the end. This is 1 Corinthians 15 and verse 16.

**1 Cor 15:16** *"For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. 17) And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! 18) Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19) If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable."* (NKJV)

Notice he's directly saying if there's not a resurrection to eternal life. If there's not salvation ultimately at the end of this picture, you got ripped off. And if you just look at Paul's own personal life you can totally see why he would say this. Because again, talk about being called to suffer. Let's just notice what this man personally had to go through. Look at 2 Corinthians 11. We'll pick up here in verse 22. This is kind of a laundry list here of the trials and persecution that Paul himself had to endure. When you read this, you can totally understand why he would say, "Man, if there's not a resurrection to eternal life at the end of this, this is a bad deal."

**2 Cor 11:22** *"Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. 23) Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. 24) From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. 25) Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26) in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; 27) in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—"* (NKJV)

Imagine that's your life. That doesn't sound like a lot of fun. To get called to a life of this. You would think this is kind of a bad deal. You know, who wants this life? I'd rather have a comfortable life. You know, a life of ease. Who wants to get called to this? Well, see, Paul is looking at it from a spiritual perspective because of the reward of salvation. That's what makes it all worth it. Because see, a guy who suffered through all of that. Through that kind of a list. Something we would look at and go, "That just sounds like a nightmare of a life to have to go through all of that." Well, the guy who endured all of that also makes an interesting comment here in Romans 8. Turn over to Romans 8 in verse 18.

**Rom 8:18** *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."* (NKJV)

In other words, he looks at all this and he admits, "Yeah, my life was painful, it hurt." This got old. In fact, if you read some of his epistles, he even says if it were up to me, I'd just as soon die and wait for the resurrection. But for the benefit of the brethren, I'll keep pushing on. But if it was up to me, I'd just assume check out because this is not a lot of fun. You can understand why he would say that as a physical human being. His life was not easy. After he got called, it was painful, it was hard. It was an endurance race. And you can imagine him just wanting it to be over. It was very understandable. But this is a guy who looks at this and says, "But you know what, when I factor in that there's a resurrection to eternal life and there's salvation offered and that lasts forever, well then this is all worth it. Now it all makes sense. Because if this is what I have to go through and I get that fantastic reward, well, then it's worth it. That balances the scale, and it all makes sense."

So, I think that's important for us to remember when we're struggling through difficult trials and life hurts. You know, and we're wondering why me and why am I going through this? Or you're like the lady I mentioned in my introduction where you're seeing a close friend who is suffering. What this lady expressed to me was that her close friend that was terminally ill with cancer. In fact, within months after that conversation her friend actually died. The lady she was referring to was having just a really ugly battle with terminal cancer. And as she expressed to me in that conversation, she goes, "I've known this woman for years. She's a good person. She's good to her neighbors. She's a good wife. She's a good mom to her children. She's just an all around good person. Why would God do this? Why doesn't He want to bless them with good things?"

Well, see, that's because God's definition of a blessing was completely different. Because He's looking at that acknowledging, "Yes, she's been a good person. But I'm going to reward her with the resurrection to eternal life later. And when she receives that, she's not going to be concerned about how much she had to suffer through this cancer. She's going to think it's all worth it." So, He's looking at it through those eyes. And that's how we have to look at it as well.

But we also have to keep this in mind, when we look at God's plan for the future. When we look at the fulfillment of the fall Holy Days and how God's going to work with the rest of mankind. The rules don't just magically go away. We can't just take the whole New Testament and kind of toss it aside and decide now it's all just about fantasy feel good. Because sometimes that's what we do. And again, it's out of good intentions. But I've noticed this throughout my life. That was something that struck me about 14 years ago, where I started scratching my head going, "Wait a minute. We have a prophetic scenario where the majority of mankind has this easy slide in the Kingdom of God."

Well, that's because we were kind of ignoring the release of Satan. We typically just kind of minimize that and rarely ever talked about it. We just kind of made it go away. And oftentimes I found over the years, when I would point out just the foundational

scriptures and the absolute mountain of scriptures in the New Testament that lay out the requirements for salvation. And say, "Well, don't we have to view the process of salvation for the rest of mankind consistent with all of this as well?" What I found was people had a hard time accepting that very basic simple concept. In fact, the counterarguments were always based on emotion. Because it comes down to a fundamental you might say quirk of human nature and how we tend to look at things. And to express this, I'd like to give you one of my favorite quotes from one of my favorite authors. Dr. Thomas Sowell, you might be familiar with him. He's kind of considered the guru of conservative thought in terms of social policy and economics and such. I mean, it's not from a religious, Church of God point of view, but he is kind of a brilliant man. And I'd like to share with you one of his quotes.

*"The reason so many people misunderstand so many issues is not that these issues are so complex, but that people do not want a factual or analytical explanation that leaves them emotionally unsatisfied."*

You see, it's a very emotionally satisfying idea to think that after Christ's return, then everything will just be rainbows and unicorns and everything will feel good and be pleasant, and everybody gets to slide into the Kingdom. Well, yes, we know for a fact during the millennial period for a thousand years, Satan is bound. The Bible is very, very clear about that. And we have lots of scriptures that lay out for us what a wonderful utopian environment it'll be. That's absolutely clear. The Bible is very, very clear about that.

But we can't throw away the rules for salvation just because of looking at an emotionally positive picture. Because what we have to understand is that what we see described in the Millennium is very consistent with the definition of blessings that God laid out in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26. We'll briefly look at some of those scriptures here in a minute. But those two chapters define God's relationship from an Old Covenant perspective with ancient Israel. And how did it work? As long as they were obedient life was going to be just blessing after blessing. It was going to be a physical utopia. That's what was being offered to them, a physical utopia. If you consistently obey, life's going to be wonderful. And it's only if you disobey that life's going to hurt.

We need to understand there's a distinct difference. The same difference that we see in the definition of blessings also plays out in the fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles, which pictures the Millennial period, and the Eighth Day period, which is when salvation is offered to the rest of mankind. And I know for some of you hearing that, you might kind of scratch your head and think, "Wait a minute, you mean salvation is only offered during the Eighth Day period?" When did Christ say that it would be? In John 7, "On the last day, that great day of the Feast, Jesus stood and He cried aloud, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."" You just read verse 39, it directly says, "This He said speaking of the Holy Spirit". Christ directly announced, it's the Eighth Day period when salvation is offered to the rest of mankind.

Now, I know there's other questions that this may not address for you in this particular sermon. But my sermons that addressed the Feast and the Eighth Day this year that are on my website and my YouTube channel go into this in greater detail and address some of the difficult scriptures around this subject. It's also covered in some study papers on my website. If you need to find my website, it's [SearchingTheScriptures.org](http://SearchingTheScriptures.org). There you'll find study papers. There's two that address the Feast of Tabernacles and the Eighth Day. One's called "The Meaning of the Feast of Tabernacles". The other's called "The Meaning of the Eighth Day". They will go into all of this in great detail for you. But what I just want you to see in this sermon is if you look at the utopian promises of the Millennium, what you see is again, very, very consistent, with what we read in Deuteronomy 28. If you obey, life goes wonderful. If you're disobedient, that's when life's going to get painful. However, it's after Satan's released, that's when you start seeing the picture of having to suffer even when you've been righteous. It's very consistent with all the foundational scriptures of the Bible.

But just to briefly look at this, let's just look at a common Millennial prophecy. Turn over to Amos 9. We're going to read here a few verses that are commonly addressed at the Feast of Tabernacles, because it addresses the Millennium. This is in verse 13.

**Amos 9:13** *"Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "When the plowman shall overtake the reaper, And the treader of grapes him who sows seed; The mountains shall drip with sweet wine, And all the hills shall flow with it. 14) I will bring back the captives of My people Israel; They shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; They shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; They shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them. 15) I will plant them in their land, And no longer shall they be pulled up From the land I have given them," Says the LORD your God."* (NKJV)

A few years ago, I was looking at this particular verse, and I kind of scratched my head going, "Okay, the plowman overcoming the reaper. What would that mean from a practical point of view? How do I quantify it?" So, I talked to a good friend about it. He and his wife did farming for a living. I grew up in a farming community in Alabama, but I was never really involved in agriculture at all. So, I don't have any expertise in that regard. So, I talked to a couple in the Church that did farming for a living. And I asked them, "Okay, help me understand what this would mean from a practical point of view. The plowman overcoming the reaper." And he said, "Well, it kind of depends upon what crop you're talking about and what area of the world that you're talking about. But generally speaking, what you're talking about is about twice your normal yield." You know, you'll just have a huge abundance in your crops is what you're talking about here.

Well, turn back over to Leviticus 26. This is the parallel chapter to Deuteronomy 28. What I want you to see here is how this, again, correlates with the definitions of blessings from an Old Covenant perspective. Turn over to Leviticus 26 and verse 9. This is what was promised to Israel if they consistently obeyed.

**Lev 26:9** *“For I will look on you favorably and make you fruitful, multiply you and confirm My covenant with you. 10) You shall eat the old harvest, and clear out the old because of the new.” (NKJV)*

And in other words, when you're harvesting to get this year's crops, you're going to still have so much left over from last year that you're going to have to be clearing out the old just so you have room to take in all the new. Well, see, that's consistent with what we just read there in Amos. And notice that not having this abundance, that is associated with disobedience. Just jump down now to verse 18 of Leviticus 26. And again, this is all associated with rebellion and not obeying God.

**Lev 26:18** *“And after all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. 19) I will break the pride of your power; I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze. 20) And your strength shall be spent in vain; for your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit.” (NKJV)*

So, notice here again, your crops failing, that's associated with disobedience. Now I want you to notice a very common scripture we typically always talk about at the Feast of Tabernacles. And what the punishment is if people are disobedient and they refuse to come to the Feast, because it's consistent with all of this. Turn over to Zechariah 14 and we'll start reading in verse 16.

**Zech 14:16** *“And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. 17) And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain. 18) If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the LORD strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. 19) This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.” (NKJV)*

Now notice again, specifically for disobedience, you're cutting off the rain. Now turn back over to Deuteronomy 28 and let's notice again specifically how it mentions the rain in this very context. Deuteronomy 28 and verse 12.

**Deu 28:12** *“The LORD will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.” (NKJV)*

So, notice again, one of the promises for obedience, it's getting rain in due season. It's getting rain at the exact times that you need it. But now notice what's associated with disobedience. Jump down to verse 24.



**Deu 28:24** *"The LORD will change the rain of your land to powder and dust; from the heaven it shall come down on you until you are destroyed."* (NKJV)

So again, it's no surprise then that during a timeframe where we have described a physical temple, a Levitical Priesthood, animal sacrifices, and the whole picture of what you would expect with the Old Covenant. I addressed this in my sermon on the first day of the Feast. It was titled "Why Will There Be Animal Sacrifices in the Millennium?" I'll just refer you to that sermon for all the finer details there. As I mentioned in that sermon, what you see in the Millennium is all the things you would see described with ancient Israel in the Old Covenant. It's the entire Old Covenant system. Well, you see blessings being handled the same way. Where as long as you're being obedient, you get rain in due season. Your crops are abundant. Your children are healthy. Everything's wonderful. It's just those who refuse to come to the Feast. You know, those that are being disobedient, disobeying God. They're suffering hard times. That's where things are difficult. As long as you have a utopian setting here with no Satan.

But one of the things in my experience in the Church of God throughout my entire life is the release of Satan after the Millennium is oftentimes typically completely ignored. And if it's ever mentioned, it's kind of minimized. And we try to sandwich it in between the end of the Millennial period and before the Eighth Day period begins and kind of minimize it and just make it go away. Now just use a little common sense and look at the layout of the fall Holy Days. When you get to sundown at the end of the Feast of Tabernacles, where are you? You're in the Eighth Day, aren't you? Is there a time period in between them? No! I've been keeping the Feast of Tabernacles my entire life now. In my late 50s, bumping on 60 here now. And I've never once gotten to sundown on the Feast Tabernacles and found myself in a timeframe in between the Feast and before the Eighth Day. Because there's not a timeframe in between. When you get to the end of the Millennium, you're immediately in the Eighth Day.

Now let's notice what happens when the Millennium ends, right after it. Turn over to Revelation 20. Revelation 20 and verse 7.

**Rev 20:7** *"Now when the thousand years have expired,"* (NKJV)

Which is when the millennium ends. Notice what immediately happens.

*"Satan will be released from his prison 8) and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. 9) They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. 10) The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."* (NKJV)

Notice what immediately happens right after the end of the Millennium is Satan's release. Well, this changes the game entirely. Because remember, persecution from Satan is one of the requirements for salvation. That's directly stated in 2 Timothy 3:12. Everyone who wants to follow Christ and pursue salvation, they're going to have to be persecuted. Who's the persecutor? That's Ephesians 6:12. That's Satan. Well, now we have him back in the equation. Well, this just happens to directly correlate with what Christ said. Christ gets up on the Eighth Day and says, "Now everybody can come to Me and receive the Holy Spirit." See, now salvation's being offered.

But see, now the definition of a blessing has changed as well. Because we go from a utopian environment, you know, because if you look at the promises of the millennium, as people are getting in line with God, you basically see three major components. This is the way I like to break it down and describe the millennium. No war, swords in the plowshares, spears in the pruning hooks. They will not learn war anymore. You have this peaceful environment. You have abundant resources. You have plenty of crops. Everything's going great, and everybody's healthy.

However, what we know is when Satan gets released, well, we have a war described. Well, then if we just notice the criteria when all this is over that Christ uses to judge the rest of mankind. How He divides the sheep from the goats. You can clearly see that these other two criteria change as well. Because notice in the Millennium, what do we have overall? Abundant resources and everybody healthy. Notice that that obviously changes during the Eighth Day or otherwise Christ's statements in Matthew 25 wouldn't make any sense. Turn over to Matthew 25 and we'll start reading here in verse 31.

**Matt 25:31** *"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. 32) All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats."* (NKJV)

Now notice this is after the return of Christ, and who does He have before him? All the nations. He's not just judging the Firstfruits. This is all the rest of mankind. Now this has got to be after the end of the Eighth Day period, because again, just notice the criteria that He uses to determine who are the sheep and who are the goats. For this criteria to make sense, these circumstances have to be taking place on a wide scale or otherwise this would just make absolutely no sense to be saying these things.

*"33) And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. 34) Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35) for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36) I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' 37) 'Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? 38) When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? 39) Or when did we see You sick, or in prison,*

*and come to You?’ 40) And the King will answer and say to them, “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’ 41) “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: 42) for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; 43) I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’ 44) “Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ 45) Then He will answer them, saying, “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ 46) And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (NKJV)*

Notice the criteria here. A lot of this is how people dealt with harsh trials. How they responded to circumstances where there were obviously widespread individuals dealing with a lack of resources and health problems. This is very different from what you see described during the Millennium. Because salvation is on the table here. As Christ again says in John 7, the Eighth Day period, this is when you can come to Him and receive salvation. This is when the Holy Spirit can be offered and the opportunity to be born in the Kingdom of God is offered. Well, now you have to suffer. Now you have to endure through harsh trials and face persecution and all the things the New Testament says about the narrow and difficult path that there are few who find it, all of that applies.

So, to understand how God not only works with us today, but how He will work with the rest of mankind in the future, we have to look at life through His eyes. Because as physical human beings, what we tend to do, and again, it's very natural. I have the same human nature as well. We tend to look at it with what makes logical sense to our physical minds. And that's the idea that, well, if a person has been a good person, if they're an honest, upstanding, good person who's nice to others and kind and giving and honest. Well, they should have good things happen to them. And if they're a bad person who's abusive and dishonest and steals from others and hurts other people, they should have bad things happen to them because that seems fair.

Don't get me wrong, God does give us the fruits of our behavior. But the rules change when salvation is put on the table. And we have to understand that's not only how it works for us today. That's how God's going to work with the rest of mankind in the future. Because He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. He uses the same set of rules all the time. It doesn't magically change for everybody else. There is no such thing as having our cake and eating it too. There is no such thing as living in a positive feel-good utopia, but also getting salvation offered to you at the same time. If you're in an Old Covenant relationship, well then, yes, everything's about enjoying this physical life. If you're being offered salvation, then yes, God does give us physical blessings. He does give us physically good things, but He's also going to require us to suffer and to positively endure through it with a good attitude. You know, to take our lumps even when it wasn't something that we deserved. It wasn't a result of our sins or our own bad decisions.

So, when we look at this subject, let's make sure that we're defining blessings as God defines them. Because if we define them as a New Covenant Christian, not only for us today, but again, when everyone else is offered the New Covenant as well, it's always going to come down to God's definition of love. And understand, the simple way to put it is God doesn't define love with the question, "Does it feel good?" He defines love with the question, "Does it do good?" So, understand, brethren, to understand our lives today and how He'll work with mankind in the future, what balances the scale is the offering of salvation. And just remember, our objective is to build His mind and His character in our lives today. So, we need to look at life the same way He does. And He defines his character, His very nature of how His mind works as agape love. And the simple way to define agape love, it's not "Does it feel good?" It's "Does it do good?"