

Last Hour

(Sermon Notes)

By Warren Zehring – 5/25/2013

Things are really getting bad – not only in the world – but in the **Church of God** as well.

One of America's last bastions of right conduct and excellent **morality** has succumbed to the forces of evil.

When I was a young Cub Scout and then a Boy Scout, I could not have been more proud than when I swore to be "**morally straight.**"

We all memorized the **Boy Scout Oath**:

On my honor I will do my best To do my **duty to God** and my country and to obey the Scout Law; To help other people at all times; To keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and **morally straight.**

Here is the **Scout Law**:

A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and **reverent.**

The Boy Scout organization has just this week has ruled that they will **no longer** honor their pledge to treat the **things of God** with **reverence** nor uphold the standard of being **morally straight.**

A week does not go by without major standards of right and truth being violated or removed completely from a nation that once believed, "In God we trust."

Our **Justice** Department in America can no longer be trusted or counted on to act **justly.**

And our own Internal Revenue Service considers Christians to be 'Enemies of the State,' worthy of being spied on.

The moral fabric of our nation is in shreds.

For many years I did not believe our demise would take place so rapidly.

That is taking place outside in the world where God's truth and law are being trampled upon.

The dangerous thing is how the Church of God is so close behind the world – following in this nation's moral decay.

The Churches of God are not **united in Spirit.** We are **not preaching the Gospel** as God has given us command to do.

Time is very short – and yet, there remains a responsibility given us that must yet be accomplished. The Gospel must be preached.

The world needs desperately to hear the good things we have been given. We have heard the Gospel message:

Mark 1:

14 After that John [the Baptist] was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching **the Gospel of the Kingdom of God**.

We understand in God's Church that the **Gospel** Jesus preached was not about Himself. It was not a gospel about "Jesus." Jesus brought the Good News.

Jesus walked on water; Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead; Jesus fed the multitude; and Jesus cleansed the lepers.

That is all true – but that is **not the Gospel** message that Jesus preached.

The Gospel – the good news that Jesus proclaimed was that He would establish **His Father's Kingdom** over all the earth.

Jesus Himself would reign and rule – and **God's Laws** would prevail in all the land, and be written in the hearts of all the people.

The Good News that Jesus preached was that He would return as Messiah and when He did He would put down all **evil** rule and all **wicked** authority and all **malicious** power.

1 Corinthians 15:

24 ... when He shall have put down all [evil] rule and all authority and power.

And then the earth will be full of the goodness of the Lord because He loves righteousness and judgment.

Psalm 33:

5 He loves righteousness and judgment: the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.

That is the message that Jesus brought.

And then, through many parables and examples, Jesus explained what the Kingdom of God **would be like**.

When the Kingdom of God would **arrive**...

What was required **to be in** that soon coming Kingdom of God.

The word "Gospel" simply means good news or good message. Jesus proclaimed the good news, and told us to believe it.

Mark 1:

15 [Jesus said,] The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the Gospel.

Jesus removed any time setting for the beginning of the Kingdom of God when He said that the Gospel was, "at hand." In fact, Jesus was already WITH them as a representative of the Gospel.

Do we truly believe the Gospel – the good news that Jesus will establish His Father's Kingdom over all the earth? Jesus taught that God's Kingdom would replace the kingdom of Satan that we find ourselves in.

The Churches of God today are letting down. They are doing everything possible to be friends with this world.

Read what God says to the Church of Laodicea in Revelation 3. This is a description of the Churches of God in this **last hour**.

Revelation 3:

16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

There is no zeal in today's Churches of God to preach the Gospel or to practice true Christianity.

Revelation 3:

17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

We believe we have all the knowledge, literature, doctrine, etc.

Revelation 3:

18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou may be rich; and white raiment, that thou may be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou may see.

God says that we lack the Godly character to be able to see the miserable condition that we are in – Spiritually.

Revelation 3:

19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

Repent means to turn ourselves around return wholeheartedly to God.

Do the Churches of God even remember that as long as God's Kingdom has not been established over this earth – with Jesus Christ ruling as Messiah – that they reside in the kingdom of Satan.

God's Word tells us to come out and be separate from this world.

2 Corinthians 6:

17 Wherefore come out from among them, and **be ye separate**, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.

Jesus taught what the Kingdom of God would be like, and how we must change; how our lives must be different, in order to qualify for it.

And He warned us, especially in this last day that there would be many traps and pitfalls competing with the True Gospel.

Matthew 4:

17 From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Jesus has given us many examples of what the Kingdom of God is like, how it would come about, and who would be a part of it.

Matthew 13:

33 The Kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal...

Matthew 13:

44 The Kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field...

Brethren, do we believe the Gospel? Do we believe that the Kingdom of God is like a fantastic treasure – just waiting to be found by us?

Matthew 13:

45 The Kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls...

Do we seek the Kingdom of God for ourselves? Do we seek the Kingdom of God for others?

Are we wholeheartedly supporting the Gospel – so that others may hear that Gospel message – and possibly be called by God?

Certainly, they need to be witnessed to.

Matthew 13:

47 The Kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea...

Matthew 13:

52 The Kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which brings forth out of his treasure things new and old...

Matthew 22:

2 The Kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,

3 And sent forth his servants to call them that were **bidden to the wedding**: and they would not come.

And little by little the picture of the Kingdom of God emerged. We have to strive to enter into the Kingdom of God.

Luke 13:

24 Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

Brethren, do we think that because we were able to see what happened to the Worldwide Church of God when they turned to Satan that we have passed the only test of true Christianity for our time? No way!

Tests come when we least expect them. Some people think that they have absolutely nothing to be concerned about. Tests come when we do not know that they are coming.

We don't get up in the morning saying, "My faith is going to be shattered today, and I am going to have it broken, and I am going to make choices that are going to take me out of the Kingdom of God." Trials come unexpectedly.

The Gospel invitation has gone to a people who have mostly rejected it. It happened to them, brethren, and it can happen to us. The Bible is full of warnings to us.

When I preach a funeral, I tell the family and friends in attendance that the only difference between the deceased and us – is only a matter of timing. In a short time we will be in the same state.

God warns us to make good use of the **time** He has allotted us.

Psalm 90:

12 So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

Psalm 39:

4 LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.

Isaiah 55:

6 Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.

God will replace those who refuse His offer. If we miss the mark, God will find someone else to take our crown.

Revelation 3:

11 Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

God will call a new convert into the Church – to take our place – if we refuse His offer. They will be Kings and Priests in the Millennium – serving with Jesus Christ – in our place – if we fail.

Revelation 1:

6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

If you want to read a sobering Scripture, these are the words of Jesus Christ in the book of Matthew:

Matthew 8:

12 But the children of the kingdom...

That is you, and that is me, brethren.

Matthew 8:

12b ... shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

God is saying it does happen, it is possible, and it takes place. Here is how I imagine this weeping and gnashing of teeth to take place.

If we who have received and responded to the glorious Gospel of the Kingdom of God, were to reject that high calling... Just before we were to perish for all eternity, God would give us a momentary distant glimpse of the glorious Kingdom of God in all of its splendor – so that we would have a taste of what we had rejected and missed out on – and that, in bitter despair would bring about our weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This is a warning to us, brethren, not everyone in the Church of God is going to make it into the Kingdom of God. We are told that some will let down – some will go off course, and not make it into the Kingdom of God.

It can happen when we do not preach the Gospel, when we do not draw near to God, or say our prayers, or forgive our enemies, or lay our lives down for the brethren – so that they might be in the Kingdom of God. It happens when we have substitute religion and do not love the brethren.

Let us look at what Jesus Christ taught, His very words when He was on the earth, about the possibility of being offended and letting go and moving on, and going back into the world.

None of these people are saying, I am going back into the world, and I am going back into sin. Satan is wiser than that.

Satan gets us to take little baby steps away from where we are being fed, where we receive the truth, and where we know that God is working.

Matthew 22:

- 1 And Jesus answered and He spoke unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven...

That is this great process that we are talking about. It started before the world was, and it will continue until its completion, after the Millennium.

Matthew 22:

- 2 ...The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son...

He is talking about **God the Father** and the Church who is going to marry **Jesus Christ**.

Revelation 19:

- 7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.
- 8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.
- 9 And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.

Now we come to verse 3, and this is where the **marriage invitations** go out. This is the **proposal** of Jesus to His Bride.

The invitations, the proposals, go out in the form of the Gospel Message.

Matthew 22:

3 And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding...

Brethren, so many people have been called to be the Bride of Christ – but few were diligent enough to hold fast. Notice:

Matthew 22:

3b ...and they would not come.

That is so hard to understand. But we saw that with the Worldwide Church of God. Look at how many people had the invitation [bidden to the wedding] and they would not come.

Matthew 23:

34 Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city.

Matthew 23:

37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that kill the prophets, and stone them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

Throughout history the invitation to the Kingdom has been refused.

Matthew 22:

4 Again, He sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner [this is the wedding supper that will take place on Pentecost] my oxen and my fatlings are killed [for the wedding banquet feast], and all things are ready: come unto the marriage.

5 But they made light of it...

Brethren, we can say, “Shame on them,” for making light of it – but this is written for our sake. Let’s make doubly sure that we are not also coming up with excuses like these:

“They said they had a job and I have to please my boss. I have to please my wife. I am not going to put up with anybodies back talk. I am not going to put up with anybody’s weakness. I have to be a man, I have to be strong, and I am not going to take that off anybody.” Satan can fill a phone book with his excuses.

Matthew 22:

5b ...and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise:

Potlucks, choir practice, elders meetings, planning committees...

Matthew 22:

6 And the remnant took his servants, and **entreated them spitefully**, and slew them.

Many brethren were kicked out of the Church for holding on to the Truth of God.

That is nothing compared to those who have resisted unto blood.

Hebrews 12:

4 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

They killed Jesus Christ, they killed the prophets, the apostles and many of the saints. The prophet Isaiah was **cut in half**.

Hebrews 11:

35 Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:

36 And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment:

37 They were stoned, they were **sawn asunder**, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;

38 (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

They tried to destroy all the true ministers who teach the truth.

They draw away a following after themselves – while they are **treating spitefully** the servants of God. That is what this scripture is talking about.

The servants of God are entreated spitefully. That is the way that Satan works.

If you find yourself a part of persecuting the true saints in any way, repent of it. If you find yourself a part of receiving that spiteful treatment – thank God – you are following in the **steps** of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:

21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his **steps**.

Matthew 22:

7 But when the king heard thereof, he was angry...

God the Father is angry. Can you imagine God the Father saying, "Please come and be a part of the Bride?" And you say, "No thank you very much."

Matthew 22:

7b ...and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.

When God gives us an invitation and we, through hurt feelings, spite, rejection, hate, or whatever it is, God is angry when we turn our nose up on His initiation to be the Bride.

Matthew 22:

8 Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. [They have not come...]

So, what does He do? The Plan of God is going to be filled up from the beginning of the creation.

God knew how many, and who, and knew their attributes, their dispositions, their intellects, and their personalities.

He knew who He was going to call. If we fall into this number [and we refuse His invitation] He is going to call somebody to take our crown, as it says in Revelation 3:11.

The **number** that God has in mind for the Plan of God will be filled. God knows the **attributes**, the **characteristics**; He knows what the Bride of His Son will be. God will call others. That is where we are now!

The last hour

Notice what God does at **the last hour**.

Matthew 22:

9 Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, **bid to the marriage**.

That is going on right now. There are new people coming into God's Church. They have never heard the truth before.

God is doing the work – we are only tools in His hands.

John 6:

29 [Notice whose work it is.] Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the **work of God**, that ye believe on Him [Jesus Christ] whom He [God the Father] hath sent.

Remember the first love when we first heard the Truth, how wonderful it was. You could not get enough of it.

Matthew 22:

10 So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found...

Now, God is calling those people you would least expect. Great things are happening in remote Africa. Just like they once did here – in America and the United Kingdom, and the entire English speaking world – and much of the Francophile (French speaking) parts of the world.

This verse is saying that, at first, God called the people you would kind of expect.

This was the people that had a little wherewithal, a little understand, and knew their way around a little bit.

He is now going out and picking up what we might refer to as the dregs of society.

People with little education, no worldly possessions, little education, foreign gentiles, broken families, prison records, divorces, and all kinds of problems...

Matthew 22:

10b ... both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.

So brethren, you and I were not called back in the 1940's and '50's when the gospel began to go out mightily.

But so many of those called then fell by the wayside.

God said invite as many as ye shall find, whoever hears this word of God, and God is instrumental in who hears it and **He draws** us out of the world. We must be called by God.

John 6:

44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me **draw him**: and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 6:

65 And He said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were **given unto him** of my Father...

'**Bid them to the marriage**' some are hearing the Gospel Message – right here in these very last days.

If we fail, when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an answer to Him, we will not be able to blame our Pastors or teachers. We will answer for ourselves only.

Romans 14:

10 But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at naught thy brother? For we shall all **stand before the judgment seat of Christ**.

11 For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.

12 So then every one of us shall **give account of himself** to God.

Matthew 22:

11 And when the king came in to see the guests, He saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment:

You see the tests and the trials continue. Just getting invited to the marriage supper is not enough. A qualification is required. We have to have on the Wedding garment. That Wedding garment is the righteousness of Christ.

The man that did **not** have on the wedding garment had not repented and overcome. He had not passed the test, and He had not put on the righteousness of Christ.

Now listen to what God the Father says:

Matthew 22:

12 And He saith unto him, Friend, how came thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.

And, of course, there is no answer for not overcoming. We have to face our trials, and we must go to our brethren and reconcile.

We must **lay our lives down** so as to help others into the Kingdom of God. Where are the true Christians of today who are doing what God says?

Lay our lives down; Sadly, that absolute Christian requirement is not well understood in God's Church.

Who is righteous? Who has a white wedding garment? Who is forgiving and loving? Who is laying his life down for the brethren? Who will reach out with an open hand?

People hear those words over and over and they just close up their ears, their heart, and their mind and they will not relent and surrender to God even once. They harden their hearts as a flint stone:

Zechariah 7:

12 Yea, they made their hearts as an **adamant stone**, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in His spirit by the former prophets:

These church going – Sabbath attending Christians will not act first – they leave that to others. They are too fearful to make the first move.

They will do it **after the fact** when they find out that somebody is safe to be around, or enjoyable to be around, or politically appropriate to mix with.

But they will not reach out up front. People today don't want to be uncomfortable, and they do not want to be inconvenienced.

They want to go into the Kingdom of God like you were going **down** a slide at a child's playground. It is not that way! It is an uphill battle, brethren.

Matthew 22:

13 Then said the king to the servants, Bind him [the man who has not put on righteousness] hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

14 For many are called, but few are chosen.

Every one of us was called. Do we think that we have passed the **only test** of true Christianity for our time?

God determined from the foundation of the world that the Messiah would come, and that the Messiah would have a Body of brethren to reign and rule in the millennium with Him.

To reign and rule we have to be **like** Christ, and we have to have the love, the forgiveness, the mercy, the compassion, the giving, and the laying down of our life, attributes that Christ displayed.

The Gospel is the Word of God going out. This is the Truth of God going out.

When we are on the radio, internet, or when we send out booklets, some of the Word of God falls in fertile soil, and some falls on the wayside.

God knows that not everyone that hears His Word is going to spring into life.

It is like people who hear the Word of God, but one little thing comes up and it is too much for them. They say, "I'm not going to put up with it," and it gets too hot in the kitchen, and they say, "I am out of here."

Brethren, let me explain: God is measuring and shaping our trials.

He promises that He never gives us too much.

You will run into people that are recalcitrant, intractable, and obstinate. You might have a boss that is froward, difficult to deal with, contrary, but God knows that.

God wants us to learn from that, He wants us to be sharpened by that, to be trained by that, and to overcome that. Do not tell God that He sends you too much, or that you do not like the trial that He sent to you.

Let's look at the parable of **the Last Hour**.

Matthew 20:

- 1 For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard.

God is not through calling all those He intends to call at this time. There will be those He calls at the **last hour** to be a part of the first resurrection.

The work of the Gospel has been going on since OT times – but there comes a time when God will wrap up that work.

Matthew 20:

- 2 And when he had agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, [A day's wage] he sent them into his vineyard.
- 3 And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace,
- 4 And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.
- 5 Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.

The householder saw that he was not going to be able to harvest the entire crop without additional workers.

Matthew 20:

- 6 And about the eleventh hour [5 o'clock – almost quitting time] he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?
- 7 They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.

The Kingdom of God awaits those who are **called, chosen and faithful** – in the Last Hour.

...Same as for those who have borne the heat of the day.

Matthew 20:

- 8 So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the laborers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.
- 9 And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. [The day's wage that had been bargained for.]
- 10 But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny.
- 11 And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house,

Brethren, God is not unfair.

Matthew 20:

- 12 Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.
- 13 But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?
- 14 Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee.
- 15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?
- 16 So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

Let us look at something that we do not often consider, but we should. We know the scripture:

Matthew 24:

- 14 This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

You may be aware that there are some who say that the Gospel has already been preached in all the world, and that it need not go to the world any more. Do not believe it, brethren.

Let me give you an example. The Church of God was sending out eight million Plain Truth magazines in the 1980's, and they were going into nearly every country around the world.

Had we sent the Plain Truth to different – eight million people, every year for twelve years, that would have been one hundred million people, or even households, that would have received the Plain Truth Magazine – Hopefully the Gospel Message.

Had we kept it up at that pace, every year adding eight million new people, for one hundred and twenty years, we would have reached **one billion** households.

But, of course, we did not nearly do that. We did not preach the Gospel to a tenth of one billion people.

The population of the world has recently surpassed the seven billion mark!

A generation ago, Herbert W. Armstrong had a high rate of name recognition, but today how many have heard his name, and how many have heard the Gospel preached?

Way over six billion people have never heard the True Gospel being preached.

And brethren, let us face it, we are not getting the job done!

The Church of God brethren are being scattered. But that does not relinquish the duty that each of us has to be a part of the end-time Gospel. There are no others to preach the Gospel Truth.

God did not call us at this hour – just to get us saved. We have work to do.

Jesus said:

Matthew 10:

23 When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.

Matthew 24:

14 This **Gospel of the Kingdom [of God]** shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come.

End: Last Hour