

The Reins of Our Hearts

(Sermon Notes) By Warren Zehrung 2/3/2018

The end-time is upon us. Time is very short, and Jesus Christ is returning soon to establish the Kingdom of God over this earth. God's people are not yet of one mind and **one heart**. Some of the brethren are putting their faith in the wrong place. Jesus says that at the end, all the churches will know that He **searches the hearts** of everyone.

Today's title from here:

Revelation 2:23 ... **All the churches shall know** that I am He that searches the **reins and hearts**: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

Adam failed to overcome Satan and save his wife, Eve, but Jesus overcame Satan and has become the Savior of the Church brethren (John 16:33, Matthew 4:1-11). We too, must follow Jesus' example and overcome Satan if we are going to be in the Kingdom of God.

Revelation 3:21 To **him that overcomes** will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as **I also overcame**, and am set down with my Father in His throne.

Overcoming Satan

Revelation 12:11 They overcame Satan by the **blood of the Lamb**, and by the **word of their testimony**; and they **loved not their lives** unto the death.

Jesus enumerated three things that are necessary to overcome Satan: First, the **blood of the Lamb** becomes effectual only after one repents of breaking the Ten Commandments. That is when our sins are covered by the blood of Christ. Second, **the word of their testimony** is the testimony of Jesus Christ. Third, they **loved not their lives** unto the death.

We know that a small number of the saints – those who have already overcome Satan – will be protected by God from Satan and his agents during the tribulation in a **place of safety**. Somehow, in God's great providence, He will protect that little flock from the horrors of the tribulation. From their protected place, this small body of saints will be a light and an example to their Christian brethren who have not yet overcome Satan by laying down their lives. They will be martyred by the Beast. Jesus says:

Revelation 3:10 Because you have kept the word of my patience, I also will keep [protect] thee from the hour of temptation [tribulation and adversity], which shall come upon all the world, to try [tribulation and testing] them that dwell upon the earth.

When Satan is unable to attack the saints in the place of safety, he turns his attack on the remaining saints who have been caught in the tribulation.

Revelation 12:17 The dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which **keep the commandments** of God, and have the **testimony of Jesus Christ**.

Notice that those Christians who do not make it into the place of safety only did two of the three things that Jesus requires for the first resurrection: They come short. These saints are **missing** the third necessary component for overcoming Satan – “they **loved not their lives unto the death.**” That is why they must be tested in the tribulation. God will graciously present one last opportunity to those Church brethren who have not yet learned to lay down their lives, to do so. Those who are not willing to lay down their lives as living sacrifices – now – will, in the tribulation physically lay down their lives in martyrdom for having neglected to be spiritual sacrifices prior to that time (Romans 12:1, Revelation 12:11).

Brethren, right now we can choose to serve one another with a brotherly love, and avoid the tribulation. Very soon it will be too late. The choice is ours. During the tribulation, those church members who find themselves caught in the wrath of Satan will have one last opportunity to exhibit the love of God – just as Jesus did. It will become abundantly clear to them that they have not yet met the criteria for God's deliverance and protection. They will finally realize that God wanted them to show that they believed Him by laying down their lives as Jesus gave us example. Those brethren in the place of safety will be a witness that God has a level of performance that must be met.

Revelation 7:14 ... These are they which **came out** of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

During the tribulation, physical martyrdom and death will be the only way to overcome Satan and gain eternal life. For those brethren caught in the tribulation it will be too late to escape with their lives because they had been unwilling to lay their lives down for the brethren the way God intended. They will have never truly learned to be their brother's keeper. They had not yet done the **third thing** necessary to overcome Satan – so they must face him again. If we have not learned what it means to lay down our lives for all the brethren we will go through the tribulation.

Many people see the time of horrendous trouble looming on the horizon – it is the Great Tribulation. It is prophesied that at the close of his 6000-year rule, Satan's great wrath will bring destruction on all the unprotected inhabitants of the earth.

Jesus Christ tells us to watch and pray always, that we may be accounted worthy to escape the near annihilation of mankind. The devastation will be so great that there would not be a single survivor – except for Christ's intervention to save an elect few. In God's great providence, He will protect a small part of His Church from the horrors of the Great Tribulation.

Most people will not make it to the Place of Safety. It is because of Satan's deception that the human race will be brought to the very brink of destruction. A great deal is revealed in the Bible about what will occur during that time. You can learn how to escape the horrors of the Tribulation, and be nourished in the Place of Safety.

Many seem to think that we are more privileged than the other church eras – and that we will just breeze into the Kingdom of God without learning to put God's Will into our lives. When Christ returns there will be a people whose consideration for their fellow brethren – with a true Christian concern – distinguishes them from those who confuse their social life for Godly service. Jesus does not want anyone to miss out. He wishes for everyone to partake of the wonderful promises He has made to the Church.

That is the very reason that Jesus issues His warnings to the last Church era. All the brethren agree that our faith must be in God only, but then so many relinquish their faith to the wiles of some organization of men.

We lost our focus back there. When Worldwide Church of God broke up, so many people went looking for the right replacement **organization**. Our focus must be on God and His will. Do we primarily talk to God in prayer? Do we listen to His response in His Word – the Bible?

I believe that if you went around to the four or five biggest remnants of WCG – and took a poll – you would find that the great majority of the brethren would say that they are of the **Philadelphian** era. I believe that there was once a Philadelphian spirit in the Worldwide Church of God.

People changed their lives immensely. They made incredible sacrifices for one another. They were willing to travel great distances to serve their brethren who were in need. They prayed sincerely, and fasted to draw near to God. The Philadelphian brethren helped the weak brethren, as well as the strong in God's Church. Not only did they stand for doctrinal truth, they selflessly exhibited an enthusiasm toward those who oppose themselves.

That era of brotherly-love is fast fading away, and the loveless Laodicean era is becoming the comfortable norm. Much of the last Church era is slated to go into the Tribulation. Understand this brethren: The signs of the looming tribulation are all around us. God will send some of our Church brethren into the great tribulation – make no mistake about that.

Revelation 2:22 Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into **great tribulation**, except they repent of their deeds.

Revelation 2:23 And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which **searches the reins and hearts**: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

No pretend religion – no substitute religion – only a **pure** motivation for some – and for others – they will be cast into the Great Tribulation – according to their works! The Tribulation is going to come on all the world in order to wake them up!

1Thessalonians 5:2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

1Thessalonians 5:3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

1Thessalonians 5:4 But ye, brethren, **are not in darkness**, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

1Thessalonians 5:5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

1Thessalonians 5:6 Therefore let us not sleep, **as do others**; but let us watch and be sober.

The Tribulation is almost upon us. And then it will be too late to avoid it. Jesus gave a parable that describes the Church just prior to His return to establish the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 25:1 Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

What we find in this parable are the two attitudes that are prevalent in the greater Church of God today. One group of people will be eligible for the **place of safety** - the other will not hear the words of Jesus Christ.

Brethren, the point is that those political corporate organizations are not going to be **so blatant this time** as the Worldwide Church of God was about the Sabbath and the Trinity, and the Law of God, etc.

Throwing the Sabbath under the bus and embracing the Trinity as the Worldwide Church of God did was not subtle - that is why **we all** saw it.

Everyone would get that. Satan is much more cunning and subtle than that!

But sliding off into a **Laodicean** mindset is much more subtle. That is why so many are headed for the tribulation. The Laodicean attitude is here and it is in the major Church of God organizations. We want to make sure that we are doing everything we can to be in the kingdom.

Matthew 25:2 And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

That is the very description of the Church brethren right now. All the brethren agree that our faith must be in God only, but then so many relinquish their faith to the wiles of some organization of men. Remember what happened. We lost our focus and the brethren became confused.

When the Worldwide Church of God broke up, so many people went looking for the right replacement **organization**. Our focus should have been on God and His will. Do we primarily talk to God in prayer – one on one? Do we ask God to show us His way to go? Do we listen to His response in His Word – the Bible?

God's Spirit of wisdom is available to us – are we utilizing it?

Matthew 25:3 They that were foolish took their lamps, and took **no oil** with them:

Jesus says that many are not utilizing His Spirit – they took no oil with them.

Matthew 25:4 But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

Matthew 25:5 While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

That is where we are right now – there's not much zeal in the Church today.

Matthew 25:6 And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

Matthew 25:7 Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

Matthew 25:8 And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are going out.

Matthew 25:9 But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

Those who draw their line in the sand – when they obviously see much wrong – will continue to slouch toward the tribulation.

Matthew 25:10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.

The problem isn't that they haven't had the Truth at one time in those bigger political corporate organizations - the problem is that they don't want to get straightened out. That's the problem. And, part of it is the Laodicean condition - people don't see their need to **repent**.

It's not enough to hang in there with a group hoping things will get better - we need to pay attention to the direction that group is going; And when you find yourself saying things like "not until they do this or that," you need to ask yourself why you are there? Because that's basically saying you're OK with things continuing to slide in the wrong direction. If the leadership in the organizations is not setting the highest of standards – it is **not** Godly leadership.

Over and over God tells us to make **a difference** between the **clean and the unclean** – Do we think that He is talking about pickled pig feet only? God is speaking of the Holy and the profane. Do we know the difference? Why does God tell His people to come out from among them and **be ye separate**?

We are not thinking correctly when we tell ourselves that, "I'll go along with them out of loyalty to an organization or a man until they reach a certain point. That is saying that you're OK with being a part of a group where things are sliding in the wrong direction.

Here is where we must be so very careful, brethren. We must **distinguish** between God's people – our brothers and sisters in Christ – on one hand... And wrong organizational leadership on the other hand.

Our brothers and sisters in Christ in Christ are **most important** to our salvation. Make the distinction: We Christians are empowered by God's Holy Spirit to overcome our self-serving human nature.

Our Christianity demands that we follow the example of Christ and lay aside our own self-interests – preferring the good of all others, spiritually speaking – which is Christian love.

We can do it – albeit in different ways because we are all unique. With all of our brethren, we must be patient and sensitive to their different levels of tolerance and their different pain thresholds.

Some brethren were totally devastated and disillusioned by the apostasy, while others were not shaken at all. Our dissimilar backgrounds and past experiences cause us to evaluate situations in different ways.

Until you see sufficient evidence of correction in the leaders – tell yourself, "I'm not interested in continuing involvement with you because you are not going in the right direction."

Will they hear you? Probably not. But you do **not** have another option. They must be witnessed to – that is your Godly obligation as your brother's keeper.

You join the unwise virgins when you begin to say, "Well, I'll just go along with them," "No group is perfect," "every group has problems," "everybody makes mistakes."

The reason that the organizational leaders do not **get it** is because they begin with the wrong premise. They begin with the premise that they are the "Church" – and as such they are right on target as far as God is concerned.

While doing away with true doctrine – in their mind, they are beyond questioning. When we question where they are taking the Church – it is like you are questioning "God Himself."

Their headquarters is beyond reproach. Everything that they do, by definition, is the right thing to do. There can never be any real self examination in a case like that. It is like when I was a Catholic – we were infallible – flawless – we could never be wrong!

They conclude that those who see the wrongdoing in political corporate organizations are the ones who must necessarily be wrong. They have become unable to apply Biblical principles to themselves or their organization. Why?

Because they begin with the **premise** that they are right on – and everyone else is wrong. Their mindset has become: When you are right – you are right – and you don't have to check any further than that.

That is why Jesus tells our generation to work on ourselves – **anoint your eyes**, so-to-speak, it's a game changer. We'll look at that in a minute.

The danger remains of missing out all together:

Matthew 25:11 Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

Matthew 25:12 But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

Matthew 25:13 Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

Loyalty to a man or a corporation is a **false Zeal**. Notice how Paul puts it:

Romans 10:1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.

Romans 10:2 For I bear them record that they **have a zeal of God**, but not according to knowledge.

Romans 10:3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to **establish their own** righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

Why does Jesus specifically tell the end-time Laodiceans to be zealous and repent? The answer is that He does not want them to miss out. He wishes for them to partake of the wonderful **promises** He has made to the Church.

Brethren, do you have the eyes to see? **Our Church has entered the Laodicean era**. Our Church is **not** a wonderful thing to behold. Let's look at it from God's point of view.

Look at how Jesus describes the **spiritual condition** of the last era of the Church.

Revelation 3:16 ...Thou art lukewarm... wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked...

Hebrews 12:5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaks unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:

Hebrews 12:6 For whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives.

Hebrews 12:7 If ye endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chastens not?

Hebrews 12:8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

Jesus will chasten some in the tribulation.

Repenting has to do with overcoming sin and turning to the law of God. It has to do with keeping the Ten Commandments.

Those who **overcome Satan** and his evil ways will be the recipients of Christ's **seven** promises in the Book of Revelation.

Remember how Jesus **overcame Satan** in Matthew 4:4?

Matthew 4:10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, **You shall worship the Lord thy God**, and him only shalt thou serve.

Brethren, **You do** realize that we must do the same thing?

Everyone who overcomes Satan and his evil ways will be the recipients of Christ's **seven promises** in the Book of Revelation. Each of the seven promises is prefaced with this statement: "To him that overcomes..."

Seven Promises

Revelation 2:7 ...To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the **tree of life**, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

Revelation 2:11 ...He that overcomes shall **not** be hurt of the **second death**.

Revelation 2:17 ...To him that overcomes will I give to **eat of the hidden manna**, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written. [The Truth of God that surpasses human understanding]

Revelation 2:26 ...He that overcomes, and keeps my works unto the end, to him will I give **power over the nations**: [Reign and rule with Jesus Christ]

Revelation 3:5 He that overcomes, the same shall be clothed in white raiment [righteousness]; and I will not blot out his name out of the **book of life**, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

Revelation 3:12 Him that overcomes will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, ... and I will write upon him my new name. [Be an integral part of God's realm.]

Revelation 21:7 He that overcomes shall **inherit all things**; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. [Family of God]

Brethren, how many of those **promises** do you desire? Do you have the **zeal** to overcome? How do we overcome Satan, the accuser of our brethren? We are given the **answer**:

OK, we come to the math portion of today's sermon.

We are going to do some addition and some subtraction – because God says that the answers are “a little here and a little there,” So that “the world will not understand.” But, God intends for His people to understand. Satan and all of this evil world must be overcome.

How do we overcome Satan? (This is a repeat from above)

We are given the answer to that question in Revelation 12:11:

Revelation 12:11 They overcame [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.”

Jesus enumerated **three** things that are necessary to overcome Satan:

Let's look at them for a second. Please number them in your notes – it will keep you out of the tribulation if you do them.

1. **The blood of the Lamb**

How do we overcome Satan by the Blood of the Lamb?

The blood of the Lamb becomes effectual in our lives only after we repent of breaking the *Ten Commandments*. Not while we continue in sin.

That is when our sins are covered by the blood of Christ.

2. **The word of their testimony** [witness record] is the testimony of Jesus Christ.

The word of our testimony means that we embrace every word and teaching of Jesus Christ – making His testimony our own testimony.

1 John 5:10 He that believeth on the Son of God has the witness [**testimony**] in himself: he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar; because he believeth not the record [**testimony**] that God gave of His Son.

1 John 5:11 And this is the record [testimony], that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

Revelation 19:10 the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

Jesus has declared that He is returning! He alone reveals how it is all going to work out. Jesus has shown what the Kingdom of God is going to be. He has taught us the Christian attributes of those who will inherit the Kingdom. Having a prophetic understanding of times, events and places will not qualify anyone for the Place of Safety. The complete testimony of Jesus Christ must become our testimony. Satan and all of this evil world must be overcome.

3. **They loved not their lives unto the death.**

Jesus laid down His life for us – we have no choice but to do the same thing.

1 John 3:16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and **we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.**

We ought means there is a definite obligation. To be under an obligation; it is not a suggestion but a requirement.

Those Christians who go into the Tribulation will eventually see that they had **not** followed Christ's example of laying down their lives for the brethren.

Homework assignment: List two times where you **laid your life down** for the brethren. This is evidence that we will have to present to Jesus Christ when we **give account** of ourselves.

Romans 14:10 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.

Romans 14:12 So then every one of us shall **give account** of himself to God.

When did you lay your life down for the brethren – really put it all on the line – job, reputation, standing in the community, even your very life itself?

We know that a small number of the saints – those who have already overcome Satan – will be protected by God from Satan and his agents during the duration of the tribulation in a place of safety. God will protect that little flock from the terrors of the tribulation.

From their protected place, this small body of saints will be a light and an example to their Christian brethren who have been left behind.

Let's look at that promise of protection. Jesus says:

Revelation 3:10 Because you have kept the word of my patience, I also will keep [protect] thee from the hour of temptation [tribulation and adversity], which shall come upon all the world, to try [tribulation and testing] them that dwell upon the earth.

When Satan is unable to attack the saints in the place of safety, he turns his attack on the remaining saints who have been caught in the tribulation.

Revelation 12:14 And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.

Revelation 12:15 And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood.

Revelation 12:16 And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.

Revelation 12:17 The dragon [Satan] was wroth with the woman [that is us the Church brethren], and went to make war with the remnant of her seed [other Church people], which **keep the commandments** of God, and have the **testimony of Jesus Christ**.

Did you notice the lack of zeal in those Christians who did not make it into the place of safety? They are apathetic slackers in that they come short.

Did you catch that? They were only doing 2 out of the 3 things necessary to overcome Satan.

1. **Keep the commandments of God.**

The blood of Christ covers those who keep the **commandments**.

2. **Have the testimony of Jesus Christ.** [That is our testimony too.]

These saints in verse :17, the remnant of her seed, are **missing** the third component for overcoming Satan.

3. **They loved not their lives unto the death.**

That is why they must be tested in the tribulation. God will graciously present one last opportunity to those saints – Church brethren – who have not yet learned to lay down their lives, to do so.

Those in the tribulation will **physically** lay their lives down in death for having neglected to be spiritual sacrifices prior to that time (Romans 12:1, Revelation 12:11).

Here is how it will come about. We know that a small number of the saints – those who have already overcome Satan – will be protected by God from Satan and his agents during the duration of the great tribulation in a place of safety. Somehow, in God's great providence, He will protect that little flock from the horrors of the Tribulation.

From their protected place, this small body will be a light and an example to their Christian brethren left behind.

Those few brethren who made it to the place of safety will be known by those who find themselves trapped in the tribulation. Those in the tribulation will realize that they kept the Sabbath and the Commandments – but they never demonstrated to God that they were willing to **lay their life down** to help others into the Kingdom of God.

Luke 12:43 Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find **so doing**. [they were not doing it.]

Delaying until the time of the Tribulation to learn to love one another will bring about a **physical** death sentence.

We can choose to be zealously serving one another with a brotherly love, and avoid the tribulation – or we can set aside zealalousness for complacency.

The choice is ours. During the tribulation, those church members who find themselves caught in the wrath of Satan will have **one last opportunity** to exhibit the love of God – just as Jesus did – by laying their physical life down in death.

It will become abundantly clear to them that they have not yet met that one important criterion for God's deliverance and protection. They will finally realize that God wanted them to show that they believed Him by laying down their lives as Jesus gave us example.

Those brethren in the place of safety will be **a witness** that God has a certain level of performance that must be met. The rest of the brethren will finally learn that true Christianity is no "gravy train."

Those who are not willing to spiritually lay their life down as living sacrifices – now – will have the opportunity to lay their life down physically in the tribulation.

Revelation 7:14 ...These are they which came out of **great tribulation**, and have washed their robes [righteousness], and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

During the tribulation, **physical death** will be the only way to overcome Satan and to gain eternal life. For those brethren caught in the tribulation it will be too late to escape with their lives because they had been unwilling to lay their lives down for the brethren the way God intended.

What will happen to those who have not taken a stand or put their own well being in harm's way to save a brother from ruin? Laying down our life as a living sacrifice is a prerequisite to qualifying as the Bride of Christ.

There are some brethren – members and ministers alike – who have not found cause to rock the boat in their organizations. So far, everything is okay – they have been able to put up with the doctrinal changes, political intrigue, substitutions for pure religion, and the way just members have been mistreated. Their personal policy is to “play it safe – and keep their nose clean.” They are not yet prepared to be the Bride because they are not considering one another to provoke unto love and to good works (Hebrews 10:24).

They will have never truly learned to be their brother's keeper.

They had not yet done the third thing necessary to overcome Satan – so they must face him again.

If we have not learned what it means to lay down our lives for all the brethren we will go through the tribulation.

Many seem to think that we are more privileged than the other church eras – and that we will just breeze into the Kingdom of God without learning to put God's Will into our lives.

When Christ returns – there will be a people whose consideration for their brethren with a true Christian concern – distinguishes them from those who confuse their social life for Godly service.

There is an awful lot of work to be done. God has placed each one of us in the Body of Christ where it pleases Him. Let us reach out at every opportunity God gives us to let our light shine.

We have to keep on doing what we were called to do.

End: The Reins of Our Hearts