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Transcript

Measuring the Urgency of Christ's Return – Feast of Trumpets

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This is a Festival of Trumpets presentation. So, here we are together on one of God's biblical festivals – the Festival of Trumpets, or *Rosh Hashana*, as the Jews call it, from the Hebrew. This festival falls on the first day of the seventh month of ancient Israel's religious calendar. They used to blow a trumpet, or a ram's horn, called a *shofar* on the first day of each month, making the trumpet blown on Trumpets the seventh trumpet. We know today that each one of the seven holy days of God signify something special in God's plan.

Passover, in ancient times, looked back on God's salvation of Israel from Egypt. He told them to paint the blood of a lamb on their doorposts to save them from the death angel that would pass over all Egypt that night. Everywhere there was no blood, He would kill the firstborn within. Those who had the blood were passed over. And so, the name Passover. Some have complained that God was being too cruel the Egyptians, but this was His vengeance on Egypt for killing Israelite babies.

But, in the New Testament, we see John the Baptist pointing to Jesus, whom he called the Lamb of God, who would save His people from their sins. So, you see what happened in ancient Egypt is a metaphor for what's going to happen again. Those people, who had the blood of the lamb on their doorposts, were passed over. Egypt, in the metaphor, symbolizes sin. So, when John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and called him the Lamb of God, who would save His people from their sins, there's the picture that we can look back to. It was about Christ, which is interesting, isn't it? Why wouldn't Christians want to observe the Passover the way He told us to if what happened back then is a picture of what's going on now?

We see, in the book of Revelation, that Jesus will return upon the blowing of the seventh trumpet of God. So, we see this day looks back to God's salvation of Israel from Egypt, but it also looks forward to God's salvation for the church, which Paul called the Israel of God today. It's to remind us that Jesus Christ will return to this earth as prophesied, will establish His Kingdom here – a literal Kingdom on the earth. So, let there be no confusion about what the Bible says.

Turn with me to Revelation 5:6.

Revelation 5:6-10 – *And between the throne* – we’re told (this is John writing at the behest of Jesus Christ) – *and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.* So, John is seeing things that are symbolic, like this one of Christ with His ability to look out over all the earth. Verse 7: *And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.* So, Jesus goes and He takes a scroll from the right hand of God the Father on the throne. *And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures* – who are in the throne room – *and the twenty-four elders* – who are there also – *fell down before the Lamb* – in astonishment – *each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.* So, you think nobody’s listening? It’s not that God doesn’t listen, it’s that He saves, as well as listens to, our prayers. *And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. And you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”* Okay?

So, is there something that’s keeping you from believing that? Perhaps your idea that we’re all going to go to heaven? No. There’s going to be a resurrection, and then we’re going to rule on the earth – but as immortals. More about that later.

To use a phrase from the apostle Paul, this day then – the Day of Trumpets – is a shadow of things to come. It’s a foretelling of something that’s to come. So, Christ, we’re told, will be the King of all the earth. And that’s why we sit here today – to learn about that day – not just *this* day – the Day of Trumpets – but the day when He returns, and to show God that has not forgotten what He will do, and that we are all for it, and that we want it more than any physical occurrence.

The return of Jesus Christ to this earth is one of the greatest hopes for all Christians. Paul even said that the entire creation groans in travail waiting for that day when we will be changed from flesh to spirit. Since the time of Christ on earth, all Christians have been hoping and waiting for that day – not only that the earth is going to be set aright and on the right track at last, but that’s the day when Christians will be resurrected to be with God.

When God called me, He led me to a church that published a large number of booklets about the Bible, and Christianity, prophecy, etcetera. That calling was in 1964. One of the booklets was titled, *1975 in Prophecy* – ancient history now, but eleven years in the future back then. Christ was to return in 1975 or sometime around then. And people would say, “Well, we don’t know for sure.” That part we got right. This all seems silly now, but in defense of the church, about 1968, the leadership realized their timing was off, and they recanted that position. However, there were some who refused to see it – I think blinded by their desire to see Christ return sooner rather than later. So, that idea persisted with a few in the church right up until 1975. I recall that the title of

the booklet created a sense of urgency in the church. Once the realization that it wasn't going to happen in 1975 became clear, the urgency melted away.

Now, years later – because of all the political upheaval in the world and the changes that we seem to be headed for, which are good, I hear Christian people – all the various Christian factions – talking about the end times once again. There's a sense of urgency building among Christian people. Looking back over time with a historical eye, it's quite likely that every Christian era has wondered if the time is now. We're not alone. Jesus said a lot of things, like there'll be famines and pestilences and wars and rumors of wars, and that would be an indicator. Well, those things have been going on ever since He said it – and from before. So, it's pretty easy, if you just zero in on part of what He said, to make that mistake.

But, with that historical perspective, should we feel a sense of urgency now? It's not a simple question. It's a difficult to understand. I've divided this presentation, from here on, into various elements of consideration, but they're not organized chronologically.

So, let's start with this: What do you mean *urgency*? Urgency – is it the same as panic or being overwhelmed by anxiety? Does it include being paralyzed by fear? When we feel a sense of urgency, does it mean to be in a hurry? Does it mean, we need it right now? If the past has been any indicator, urgency may have caused some of us to jump to wrong conclusions. But, if we read the words Jesus spoke about His return, we will know how to feel and we will know what to do. It's also interesting to realize that the term *urgency* and *urgent* are used in the Bible, but they're never used in connection with Christ's return. Why is that? If urgency is not what we need, what is it? What do we need? Well, let's unpack it a bit.

Let's look first in Matthew 24:36. Jesus said – this is Jesus talking to His disciples in private:

Matthew 24:36 – *But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.*

So, I wondered, “Is God keeping a secret from everybody up there – and from us?” That could be, I suppose, but I think, really, that He's waiting for certain events to occur so the time will be right – that it's ready. In fact, Jesus implies that. And since He's the One who makes the decision, He's the only One who knows. I think most of us know this. We've read it before, but we don't act like we know it sometimes. Think about it. Whose plan is it? Is it your plan? Is it my plan of salvation? No, it's God's plan. He gets to decide when the time is right.

Let's read what Jesus says about this in Matthew 24 again, verse 21:

V-21 – *For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.* So, a “cataclysm of biblical proportion,” to quote Dan Aykroyd – the worst thing that has ever happened will happen just before Christ returns. *And if*

those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. When Jesus was saying this, back then, we didn't have the ability to blow ourselves off the planet. But we do now, and we have had for quite a while. So, not one person would survive what will happen just before Christ's return. But God is going to return – He's going to send Christ back – to cut that time short so that humanity will be saved.

We know that Christ will come back and God is going to send Him. When is He going to come? Well, not one minute before the best time for it and not one minute after the best time. So, we can be confident of that. If we have a problem with that, maybe we need to think a bit about being less controlling. Controlling doesn't work with God. He knows best and He knows He knows best, so He's going to do it when it's best. And that's good. Right? So, no need for anxiety about when that's going to happen.

But there is a time of urgency – after I've said all that – for some of God's people. Which ones? Well, Jesus explains that too in Matthew 24:15.

Matthew 24:15-22 – *So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)....* Now, let's think about that a minute. The abomination of desolation was a historical event. A Seleucid ruler named Antiochus, and named himself Epiphanes – that means the glorious ones – so a real ego problem – he sacrificed a pig on the altar in the temple and set up a statue of Jupiter Olympus there, which is a total desecration to all the Jews. And on that day, by surprise, butchered about 10,000 Jews. It was a sudden thing that happened. Nobody knew it was coming until it had occurred. And all the people of Israel remembered that. It was some 200 years before Christ said that – so, a part of their history. We can think back to the Revolutionary times – we know that happened – well, they knew about Antiochus Epiphanes. ...*then* – He says – *let those who are in Judea* – if you see that happening again in Jerusalem – in Judea – *then let those who are in Judea* – they're the one that need the sense of urgency – *flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in winter* – because it will be cold then – *or on a Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation* – it's going to happen quickly – *such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.* And that period lasts three and a half years, we're told in other places. It is a persecution on God's people – that's part of it. *For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.*

So, before I make the main point of this scripture related to our topic today, let me step aside for a moment and call your attention to Jesus' comment about fleeing on the Sabbath. He's talking about people who later will see something sudden and dangerous take place. That implies that

just prior to His return – from the time He said that until His return, which has not occurred yet – so that would include the time we’re in now – Christians will be keeping the Sabbath. Why would they do that, if it had been changed to Sunday. The proof of Sabbath observance for Christians is *all* through the New Testament. Even this off-hand comment Jesus makes about it shows us something important. And, if we live by every word of God, as He said we should do, then take it in.

Now, back to the point of the passage. Jesus is talking to people in Jerusalem after they asked Him about the temple. And He said it would be destroyed. His comment for people who are in Jerusalem, as the takeover of the city by two men called the beast and the false prophet, if a person is in the city, as it starts to unfold – it’s going to happen so fast – that one would have to leave immediately, taking only what is at hand. So that does demand a sense of urgency, doesn’t it? And it also demands one other thing that we’re going to discuss in a minute.

But this raises the question...and let’s look at this chilling scripture in Revelation 22:17. John wrote this, but he was in vision. The one that was giving him the vision was Jesus Christ Himself. John writes what He said. He said:

Revelation 22:17 – *“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I have heard Christian ministers tell people to stay away from Revelation. And yet, if they’re a part of the church, it’s for them! Then He issues a warning about adding or taking away anything from the Bible. And then He asserts:*

V-20 – *“Surely I am coming soon!” Amen.* But there’s that word *soon*. What does that mean? Well, I can guarantee you it means something different to you and I than it does to Christ and to God. To God, *soon* means *when the time is right*. We read that already, right? But most of us want it to come *now*. John even says that After Jesus said, “Amen,” he said, “Come, Lord Jesus!” He wanted Him to come. It was urgent that He come.

So, why do we feel like it needs to come now? Well, I think, because we are overwhelmed by the evil and the suffering that is caused in this world and we want it to be over. And that’s not a bad thing! In fact, that’s how we *should* feel.

If you’ll turn to Ezekiel 9:4, it says:

Ezekiel 9:4 – *And the LORD said to him, “Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it.”* So, He’s talking to an angel to do that. That’s his job.

But we have to remember that while we’re groaning, we worship a God who is utterly committed to our inclusion in His eternal family – so committed that He has willingly turned over His own Son to this evil world to kill Him in a most horrible way, so that His plan for us could become a reality. Clearly, He’s willing for the world, and even His church, to suffer, if that’s what it takes

for us to realize that we don't know how to rule ourselves. It's an all-in thing for God. So, He's going to do whatever it takes and our comfort isn't really His priority.

So, what are we to do? Well, there are two things. While we can't know the day and the hour, we can take what Jesus tells us will lead up to the end time and watch for it. The reason He's telling us all these things is so that we can watch for them. We can know it's coming. So, we need to be on the alert and watchful – not so desirous in our watchfulness that our desire causes us to misinterpret world events, but to be watchful. Jesus uses a biological example to help us understand about how to watch and how to feel.

Not long before I left for college, I was out in my backyard one evening with my parents. Several years prior, my father had planted a dwarf fig tree. It was about the size of a bushel basket by now, and as it grew, the body of it sat about a foot off the ground – not very tall. And each fall, as the figs would begin to ripen, my father's eagerness to get the first ripe fig would grow stronger. He would go to the bush and test the figs to see if they were getting soft, and would say, "I think this one will be ready tomorrow." But without fail, the next day, he would eagerly go to the bush only to find that that fig he was looking at had disappeared. And he would then ask each of us if we had picked his fig. Of course, none of us had, so he was perplexed. He couldn't figure it out. Neither could we. So, this particular evening, we were all out in the yard when Fritz, our dachshund, casually sauntered over to the fig bush, climbed up into it with his two stubby front legs and surgically plucked the most ripe fig and ate it. Mystery solved. My father wasn't the only one watching the bush. Fritz, however, considered figs ripe a day earlier than my dad.

So, what does this story have to do with Bible prophecy? Well, verse 32 – Matthew 24:

Matthew 24:32-33 – *“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates.*

Now, my brother-in-law told me recently that when a fig ripens, it's only going to stay ripe for a few days, and then it's going to start to degrade rapidly. So that's a perfect metaphor for what's going to happen.

He gives us signs to watch for, not so that we will know the day and the hour – I mean, nobody knows when that fig is going to get ripe. Right? But we can see it there and we know it's getting ready. So, we can tell. We can recognize the ripening of world events, if we will look at it. However, we don't know when things will ripen to God's liking.

That's the first thing we need to do – is to be watchful. And here's the second. It's been said that if the Bible says it once, you can be sure of it, but if it says it twice, you better pay attention. Because it's important, more so than other things. Well, not once, not twice, but numerous times, Jesus told a certain type of parable. The parable of the rich man, who went on a trip, and what his

servants did while he was gone. I think there were two of that kind of parable. And then, there's another kind of parable of ten virgins. In Matthew 25, which is a continuation of this same topic we've been working on so far, this parable adds something else besides watchfulness. He says the ten virgins were invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb. They all had lamps and while they were waiting to meet the groom, they would not be caught in the dark. But, as the evening got later, five ran out of oil. They didn't bring enough. They tried to beg some oil from their well-stocked friends, but their friends knew they needed to keep what they had. So, the five had to go and try to buy more. And while they were gone, the gates opened, and the five who were prepared were invited in. Then later, when the unprepared came back, the gates had been closed. And so those two fateful words described them. They were *too late*.

Some people will decide, after listening to Jesus' story, to go to the store and stock up on batteries for their flashlights, but that's not what this parable is about. There's no need for physical preparation. If we're to be saved, that will only happen by God's grace. And there is no way to prepare physically for a three-and-a-half-year tribulation.

I have some food set back, in case there's a societal breakdown or major power outage that we could get by for a while, but how much food do you need to save for a three-and-a-half-year problem like that. There's no way to physically prepare for what's coming.

So, this story is *not* about physical preparedness. We all receive a calling from God and that's like an invitation. So, we get our invitation, and we can lay out our clothes, and we get to show up that night at the right time, and we can show our invitations to the doorman, but we have to be ready. But didn't you say, "No physical preparation?" Well, in the parable, our clothes are God's righteousness through Christ's grace. It's living a good Christian life. That's the clothing – a life filled with kindness and care for others. And our invitation is our calling. It's not a paper card. And the right time is our baptism in Christ. So, simply put, we need to be *spiritually* ready – spiritually prepared. Jesus said this over and over again. He never said we would need three months of freeze-dried food. God's preparedness is not out of urgency. It comes from what we can call the long view of our life in God's care.

Now, if you want to think more about what goes into and causes us to take the long view, you can go to liferesource.org to our *Series* page, and look for the series *Making Life Easier*. In there – in that series – you'll one called *Taking the Long View*. In fact, I think it might even be the first one.

So, every year since I was eighteen, I have attended a Feast of Tabernacles, and I've kept this day as well. And every year, I had to know when it was coming – in other words, I had to be watchful – and I had to prepare for it. I had to pack, save money, secure lodging, etcetera. But there was something else that naturally came along with it – a sense of anticipation – impatience even. God has built a festival that creates in us the same feeling we need to have about the return of Christ, which is the very same time we'll be resurrected to eternal life. There's nothing bad about that – nothing fearsome. It's all good, as we say. There's a terrible cataclysm that occurs before Christ

returns. And when He returns, there's going to be a huge battle He's going to fight, but just before that battle begins, we're going to be resurrected. And that's fantastic! That's the hope of a Christian. That's why this day – the Feast of Trumpets – is *so* important.

The Bible tells us that Jesus is the first of the firstfruits of God's plan. So, we know He's the first of the firstfruits. We know He died, and was resurrected, and became an eternal spirit once again. And then we are the firstfruits. He's the *first* of us and we're to follow Him. God's faithful committed servants are the firstfruits of His plan. And then will be resurrected just like He was – to spirit life at the seventh trumpet – the same day Christ returns to the earth. You can read that in the Bible. 1 Corinthians 15 is a good place to find it. And the fact that we are only the firstfruits teaches us that something else will follow for the rest of humanity. And that will be amazing! They're not all going to burn in an everlasting hell. Most of them are going to be resurrected and given their first opportunity to know God.

So, there are other fruits to be raised up. That's why we're called the *firstfruits*. So, there's another resurrection for the rest. And that resurrection has its own holy day. So, we're going to leave that off for now. Regarding *our* resurrection, I could quote scriptures we know well about the trumpet sounding and us being changed in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, but let's look at a scripture about this topic that's a little less quoted. It's in 2 Thessalonians 2, verse 13:

2 Thessalonians 2:13-15 – *But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. And what is the glory of the Lord Jesus? Well, it was His resurrection from death and His change into eternal life – to an eternal spirit. That's going to happen to us too. The glory of our Lord Jesus Christ will be ours. So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter. I think this scripture encapsulates this point. God chose us. We didn't choose Him. He saves us to be His firstfruits by coming to live in us by His Spirit and by our belief in God's truth. And the point of all that is that we may obtain the same glory that Jesus Christ obtained and has passed on to us.*

So, this is a day of contrasts. The buildup to is the worst thing that has ever happened. And then the two best things that will ever happen occur right in order after that. Christ is going to return to the earth and fight the battle of Armageddon, subdue the rebellious, and set up His Kingdom, and then our resurrection to eternal life at that same time. What an amazing day it is!

Paul ends his statement that we just read with these fitting words:

V-16-17 – *Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.*

This is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.