

A Sense of Belonging

Opening Night of the Feast of Tabernacles

(Sermon Notes) By Warren Zehrung 10/4/2017

The theme for the Feast of Tabernacles this year is, "The Church in the **Midst** of the Millennium." That's 500 years from now – what will it be like then? What will the Church be like half way through the millennium? It will be so different under the rule of Jesus Christ that we cannot begin to imagine it. Let's set the stage for the Feast of Tabernacles this year.

The Feast of Tabernacles celebrates the great **spiritual** harvest that will take place during the Millennium as multiple billions of converted **church** people come to know God's truth and receive His gift of eternal life!

I need to begin by **defining** "Church" because it has taken on the wrong implication of corporate **organization** – even by many of God's people. For about twenty years now, I've chosen to use the term, "**brethren**," to avoid the wrong connotation that we developed in God's Church. Some of you will remember when 'Church' and 'Pasadena' were practically synonymous and often used interchangeably.

I want to use the **Biblical definition** of Church. In looking at the definition of the word "Church" we will encounter other similar ways of describing the meaning. "Church" means: Assembly; Congregation; Brethren; First Fruits; Saints; Flock; Body of Christ; Called out ones; etc.

An implication of corporate organization with a ministerial hierarchy over the brethren as "the Church" is found nowhere in the Scriptures. The Church is the Body of Christ as in Colossians 1:24

Colossians 1:24 Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His **body's sake, which is the Church:**

Christ's body of faithful believers is the Church.

Romans 14:8 For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, **we are the Lord's.**

We belong to God. God says that we are His. His people. We are the Church **of** God. ("**of**" means possessive) God's owns us. We belong to God.

Isaiah 43:1 But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; **you are mine.**

This is the specific purpose statement of tonight's sermon – We belong to God – we are His. He possesses us.

Hebrews 12:23 To the general **assembly** and **Church** of the **firstborn**, which are written in heaven.

Simply put, The Church is **God's people**. The nation of Israel was the first group to be designated as **God's people**. (Genesis 12:2)

Speaking of Moses in the New Testament:

Acts 7:38 This is he [Moses], that was in the **Church in the wilderness.**

Brethren, we are **spiritual** Israel.

Galatians 6:16 And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the **Israel of God**.

The meaning of "**Church**" then, refers to the **spiritual people of God**. That is what I mean when I'm talking about "The Church in the Midst of the Millennium."

Half-way through the millennium – **most** of the people on earth will be the **spiritual people of God**. They will belong to God.

Joel 2:28 And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will **pour out my spirit** upon **all flesh**; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions:

That is universal conversion. There will be no class distinction, or what the world considers second-class citizens.

Joel 2:29 And also upon the servants [slaves] and upon the [lowly] handmaids in those days will I **pour out my spirit**.

We know pretty well what the world is like today. We – the Church of God – **do not** fit in here. It is becoming harder and harder to exist on this earth. And that is because we do not **belong** with the people who reject God and His law.

Romans 8:9 ... Now if any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not **belong** to Him.

Everything is going awry – Everything is going the wrong way – and we always find ourselves – the odd man out.

We do not vote. We do not eat a lot of the food that others eat. We will not obey the laws of the land with regard to same sex marriages. We obey God and not man (Acts 5:29). The music is not for us. Social media is not for us. The movies are not for us. Speaking of this present evil world:

Romans 3:10-12 As it is written, There is **none righteous**, no, not one: There is none that understands, there is none that seeks after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

We do not worship on the same day as the world does. The news is a bunch of propaganda lies.

Romans 3:13 Their throat is an open sepulcher; with their tongues they have **used deceit**; the poison of asps is under their lips:

This is Satan's world – we do not **belong** here. We do not agree with what is being taught in schools. Our neighbors think we have strange customs. We do not swear to God in court, and we do not kill in wars.

Romans 3:14-18 Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear / reverence / respect of God before their eyes.

The Church of God does not **fit well** into today's world – does it? But all that is about to change.

America, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand – all the English speaking nations – the **remnant** of modern Israel are about to be destroyed and cease to exist – and some nations that do not speak English, like France, the derivative of the tribe of Reuben – all, will be soon decimated.

But a comparatively small physical **remnant** of Israel will survive the tribulation, and to live-over into the world tomorrow. That is where God's people in the millennium will come from.

Isaiah 11:11 And it shall come to pass in that day [Day of the Lord], that the Lord shall set His hand again the **second time** to recover the **remnant** of His people, which shall be left [alive], from [all over the world] Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.

We see here that **modern Israel** has been carried captive into every foreign nation and God will bring about their return.

Isaiah 11:12 And He shall set up an ensign, a sign, a banner for the nations, and shall **assemble** the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

God will point the way for those – His people – who **belong** to Him.

"Assemble the outcasts of Israel" – look closely – that means that God is again **assembling** His people – His **assembly** – the people who will make up the beginning of His millennial Church.

Please do not look to any man to get you to the Place of Safety and the New Promised Land. That's the New Church in the New Wilderness. The aftermath of the tribulation will be like the twin towers at Ground Zero in lower Manhattan, New York that burned for over three months after the Islamic suicide attacks that brought down the World Trade Centre. Can you imagine the amount of **time** it will take to clean-up after the tribulation.

Beginning after the tribulation, in the world tomorrow, there will be a small **remnant** of physical people who will multiply and fill the earth once again. They will be the beginning Church of the millennium.

Jeremiah 30:3 For, lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again *those of the* captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and I will **cause them to return** to the land that I gave to their fathers [ancient Israel], and they shall possess it.

Not only will they own the land, they will be taught and instructed by the resurrected saints.

Jeremiah 30:21 This is God's way... walk ye in it...

But before that takes place, this present evil world will go through unprecedented turmoil, war and **tribulation**.

Who will live over into that Wonderful World Tomorrow? How will they be protected from that evil day?

Jeremiah is speaking of the physical people who God has hand-picked to populate the New World Tomorrow. God says in:

Jeremiah 23:3 And I will gather the **remnant** of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase.

Here's where we come in brethren!

Jeremiah 23:4 And I will set up **shepherds** over them which shall feed them: [As we saw recently in Isaiah 30:21, the shepherds will teach them and guide them saying "This is the way, walk ye in it."] and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking in anything, says the LORD.

Brethren, we are being selected and trained NOW to teach God's way. Jesus Christ, ruling the converted people in the millennium, will usher in **dramatic** differences. Jesus will bring with Him the blueprints for a brave new world.

Streets, villages, towns, cities and nations will be surveyed. Where mountains need to be moved – they will be moved.

Isaiah 41:15 Behold, I will make thee new sharp heavy equipment having *tungsten carbide* [my translation] teeth: thou shalt grind the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff.

Almost immediately many small locations will become beautiful garden paradises. At the Feast each year people will trade their favorite ornamental flowers and fruit varieties – like at a State Fair. And that is only a **reflection** of how the hearts of the people will be changed.

Jeremiah 24:7 And I will give them an **heart** to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be **my people**, and I will be **their God**: for they shall return unto me with their **whole heart**.

What will God's people – the Church – be like half way through the millennium? The theme for the Feast of Tabernacles this year is, "The Church – God's people – in the **Midst** of the Millennium."

In this opening sermon of the Feast of Tabernacles I've chosen the topic of **a sense of belonging**. Brethren, have you ever felt **a sense of belonging** – like you were in the right place where you ought to be – loved, accepted, wanted, needed and cherished?

The first time that I can remember having **a sense of belonging** was at my grandmother's home for Thanksgiving when I was about six years old.

There was baked turkey, dressing and gravy, cranberries, and pies... Not only were the delicious aromas wafting from the kitchen overwhelming, the many overlapping conversations and exchanges between aunts, uncles and cousins told me that I was included and **belonged** there among them all.

I was in my element. I knew that my grandmother loved me because she always made my favorite – banana pudding with vanilla wafers.

It was my place and lot in life. I did not know that I needed interpersonal relationships – but I knew to the core of my being that I was where I **belonged** – with no desire to move out of that secure place.

Somehow I was **fulfilled** there – cherished and appreciated – being a part of something larger. Later, I did **not** sense that same security and love at school or at the Catholic Church – which were supposed to be big parts of my life.

A sense of belonging is a God instilled need, just like the need for air, food, shelter and security. The **feeling that you belong** is most important in each of us. It adds meaning and value to our lives – which in turn helps us later on when trials come.

It is a God-given responsibility that we be there for each other. That **feeling, that you belong**, helps us even in coping with intensely painful emotions. It is very important to know where you **belong**.

We instinctively know when we are **out** of our element – or when we are not welcomed. There is nothing worse than to be on the receiving end of a Cold Shoulder – because it says to you clearly – you **don't belong there**.

Where is your place?

We have **a sense of belonging** when we are with our family, with our mate, and with those with whom we have a common goal and belief set. That is where our loyalties lie. We tend to have an 'inherent' and 'innate' desire **to belong** and be a useful part of something greater than ourselves. There is a basic need to be accepted. When any of those things are shattered – we feel rejected – we don't **belong there** anymore – because "there" no longer exists as an option for us.

The Biblical concept of 'Church' is much more than organization, authority, name, numbers... We are a spiritual entity.

The 'Church' is those with a core set of beliefs, practices and identity of a people led by God's Spirit – with a true unity of that Spirit.

There are many groups that *claim* to be God's Church *without* possessing the all **encompassing life's set** of ideal standards and boundless Christian love.

It is God alone who has separated us from this evil world.

Colossians 1:12 Giving thanks unto the Father, who has made us meet / fitting / proper to be partakers of the inheritance of the **saints** in light: [The saints and the Church are one and the same!]

God the Father has placed us where we **belong**:

Colossians 1:13 Who has delivered us from the power of darkness [where we do **not belong**], and has conveyed us – moved us - transferred us into the Kingdom of His dear Son:

So that:

1John 3:2 We are **now** the children of God...

I hope it was like this for you, but when we originally came into God's Church – **almost immediately we had a sense of belonging**. Why was that? Something deep inside of us said to us, "This is it! This is where I belong!" "The Truth is taught here!"

There was: Hope... Expectation... Godly Love.

That **sense of belonging** that we experienced and realized was not for the **organization**... not for the authority; ... not for the group's name... not for the corporation.

But, that **sense of belonging** – was with God's true people. The people cared about us... we cared about them... They checked on us to see if we were doing OK. They were there when we were sick or in need. They shared their hope of the Gospel with us. They cared enough to count us among themselves. We had a deep **sense of belonging**, and not only that, we found a sense of purpose – having something in our lives that was so meaningful to us that we could not give it up.

It inspired us to fully **immerse ourselves** in the one thing that would result in our being Children of God – where we **belonged** – with the people of God – that was **our sense of belonging**.

That realization, that achievement, was what this life is all about. We were inspired to know, and become all we could be because we had found our great sense of purpose in life. **We had become God's people.**

I had occasion and opportunity to go to California in 1979. Early one Sabbath morning I took a stroll – I had the Ambassador College campus all to myself before 6 AM. The Pasadena grounds were beautiful and millennial to see and experience – a garden fit for kings and queens – a pristine and immaculate landscape with the trees, structures, bubbling brooks running across the campus, with bright tropical fish and regal swans... Though a stranger to Pasadena, I felt a sense of Shalom. I felt that I **belonged** to something momentous.

“Shalom” means **peace**. “It’s a good thing.” “Shalom” also means the tranquility and harmony of Justice, Prosperity, Salvation, Healthiness, Wholeness, Integrity, Soundness, Righteousness and Well-being.

As the early morning community awoke and came to life, the experience was millennial for me. The music of the Ambassador Chorale was angelic... The young students were pleasant, beautiful and idyllic... Seeking and working for the benefit of others – physically and spiritually – ahead of personal wants, desires and expectations.

I thought to myself, “Surely the world will see the benefits and the way of God...” The Gospel was going to all the world with considerable power. The Church was expanding rapidly... I was excited – I **belonged**... surely, Jesus will return at any time...

But what I did not realize then is that in every age – everyone must be tested to see if it is truly God’s way that is sought...

But a major testing was about to descended upon all the people because lurking beneath the surface there was greed, selfishness, unbelief, power, corruption, cruelty, un-conversion – all these caused the love of many to wax cold as it says in:

Matthew 24:12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

Even unscrupulous ministers covered for their corporations and peers rather than seeking and working for the benefit of others – physically and spiritually – ahead of their own personal wants and desires...

But look at the Church now, today – **what have we let the Church become?** God’s people are confused, split, shattered and scattered all over the face of the earth. Remember when:

Matthew 19:27 Peter said unto Jesus, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?

Peter and the others had left their businesses and extended family behind because they knew **where they belonged**.

Matthew 19:29 And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake ...

We too had done that too, but after being disfellowshipped for holding on to the very doctrines (now professed by United, COGWA, Living, etc.) – we could not go back where we had come from... our families, our congregations...

Our whole heart was with God and God’s people. We had found where we **belonged**...

The promise of Jesus Christ remained... but apostasy swept the Church like a typhoon – sweeping everything away... It was to be expected:

John 16:2 They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever kills you will think that he doeth God service.

The Church was our entire life – we **belonged** with those faithful saints.

Yes, there were storm clouds on the horizon – when the man who was Head of Church Administration Worldwide (Victor Kubik) ended it all for us.

It was worse than a Cold Shoulder that says, “You are not wanted here... You **do not belong** here.”

I was fired; we were disfellowshipped, and put out of God’s Church for upholding our long held doctrine (Hebrews 6:1-2), and for keeping the Sabbath Day holy.

My **sense of belonging** was severely tested. And, it was not just us who were **put out**. A small number of other faithful members of the body of Christ **stood strong**... and paid the same price.

It was as though we had lost our way – but we had not: God was still God. Everything I had proven was still proven. Jesus Christ was still coming back. The Sabbath Day was still holy. God was still on His throne.

As the dust began to settle the question was clear: “Who were really a part of the true Church brethren, and who were those that were only a part of the Godless organized corporate establishment?”

For a few weeks we **secretly** met with a few faithful brethren – while the Worldwide CoG **spied** on us. I called one of my old bosses at Pasadena – Evangelist Richard Rice who had recently sent me a book on the **Trinity** doctrine. I reminded him that Pasadena had gotten rid of me – not the other way around. I did not ask him – I told him to call off the hounds – get Pasadena off my back – to cease and desist their interference in what I was doing, or there would be legal ramifications.

My sense of belonging had evaporated into thin air.

Look at the scattered and poorly instructed Church of God as it exists today.

Who can truly feel a strong **sense of belonging**? There is too much skepticism. Where could any of you go right this minute and feel welcomed as a brother or sister in Christ? United, Cogwa, Living... another organization?

Right now there are not very many brethren who are experiencing their first love accompanied by **a right sense of belonging**.

Some are happy to belong to what they believe is the **richest** church.

Some are happy to belong to what they believe is the **largest** church with the most members.

Some are happy to belong to what they believe is the **oldest** of the groups with the highest ranking ministers.

Some are happy to belong to what they believe is the **smartest** bunch of members. [perhaps a little arrogance there]

Where is the belonging?

How will the Church brethren grow through the early years of the millennium to the point where every member will fully experience a sense of belonging?

Do not get me wrong, there are probably 7000 NOW who have not bowed their knee to Baal – but they are hard to find.

And, do we all feel **a sense of belonging** to the entire body of Christ?

A member in Africa wrote this to me last week:

“The Churches of God are slowly dying off simply because they cannot "grow in Truth" due to overriding doctrinal committee authority and corporate rules and fear of losing more tithe payers... They are not humble enough to confess doctrinal errors and/or merge with others who think just a little differently.”

There are other reasons of course.

What will it be like to be in the Church of God – half-way through the one-thousand year reign of Jesus Christ? What will it be like from Sabbath to Sabbath? Will we have three songs, an opening prayer, a sermonette, special music, a main sermon, etc...

What will it be like all week long – when all of our neighbors have God’s Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28)?

Jesus will be ruling His Father’s Kingdom from Jerusalem!

What will the people be like?

Habakkuk 2:14 For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

The people of God will possess **a sense of belonging** that is **NOT** possible today.

Psalms 100:1 A Psalm of praise. Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands.

Psalms 100:2 Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing.

Psalms 100:3 Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; **we are his people**, and the sheep of his pasture.

We belong to God – we are His possession. How do we get from where we are today – to where we will be 500 years from now in the millennium?

The fact that the first citizens of the millennium will be the survivors of the Great Tribulation, through God’s direct intervention, will instill a great sense of camaraderie like we’ve seen following a number of catastrophic happenings. People naturally come to the aid of victims in need – even when it means placing themselves in peril.

People will naturally place their lives in harm’s way to help those they don’t even know – to survive.

That brotherly love – even in a much greater way – will pervade the New Nation being formed by Jesus Christ.

All living survivors of the tribulation will be **brothers and sisters** to one another in a way that is hard for us to imagine.

The Two Witnesses will have made it very clear that twelve thousand from each of the tribes of Israel would survive and live over into the World Tomorrow. They will all know that they are literally **brothers and sisters** to one another through the miraculous intervention of Jesus Christ.

That fact alone will give them a strong sense of belonging – and it will only grow stronger and stronger as we move forward into the millennium.

With Jesus ruling from Jerusalem in accordance with God’s perfect law – the human spirit in man, coupled with God’s Spirit will **soar** to the heights that God originally intended!

Everyone will respect one another. All will see Jesus Christ and God the Father in others. They will see only the good in their brethren. They will treat one another as we treat God Himself.

All men will depend on one another.

Every child will reach his full potential – all talents will be fully developed. The weak will be made strong and secure. Every mind will be mature and brilliance will be the norm.

Everyone will know and love everyone – even when they haven't met – because everyone will have a sense of belonging to one another.

John 10:28 I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

Because, that is where **they belong**.

End: A Sense of Belonging