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As the singers sang the two hymns, the thought came to me when the call to the Lord was made, from the Gospel of John, chapter 5. Here I read verses 39 and 40.

[39] ***Ye search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me.***

[40] ***And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.***

There are people who search the Holy Scripture to find confirmation of their own teachings and views, but they do not come to the Lord. It is very easy to understand this when we look at the religious world, particularly at Christianity.

There are currently 310 different denominations united within the World Council of Churches. But with God, there cannot be so many churches. With God, there's only one church, namely the New Testament church, and that is what we shall speak about today.

Specifically this morning; this afternoon, we will examine the prophetic aspect of the plan of salvation from both the Old and New Testament.

When our Lord says in Matthew 16, "***I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it***" [Mat 16:18], he did not say to Peter, "Build my church," or to Paul, "You do it," or to anyone else.

He distributed the ministries, appointing apostles, prophets, teachers, and so on, within the church.

But salvation, the building up of the church, have not been left to an organization, nor entrusted to a human being, but the Lord, as Redeemer, as Savior, builds his church himself and perfects it until it appears before his face "***without spot or wrinkle***" [Eph 5:27], as Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians.

The great question we must all ask ourselves, ladies and gentlemen, dear brothers and sisters, is surely this: Do we belong merely to a national church, to a denomination, to a free church, or even to some splinter group which is commonly referred to today as a sect? Do we merely hold some idea that someone else has put forward, or have

we had a personal experience with God and have thus been incorporated into the church of the living God?

From these two lectures, you will clearly understand that we are indeed living very close to the return of Jesus Christ.

And I earnestly ask you all not to shrug your shoulders or shake your heads, nor to think to yourselves, "Huh, that's what they always said and it hasn't happened yet."

God has a timetable; he has a plan. And we will speak and write about this too, so that we may all have the opportunity to gain an insight into our God's plan of salvation, to anchor our faith in his Word, and thus to place our trust in him, in the certainty that with God everything happens at the right time and in the right way.

In this serious time, it is truly a matter of, firstly, hearing the promises from the Word of God, believing them, and then also experiencing them personally. I do not believe it is enough for us as individuals to be part of something that was not brought into being by God and that has no prospect of standing before God.

Whoever wishes to be saved must forsake their own way and their own thoughts, as is clearly stated to us in Isaiah 55, and must return to the Lord and find the way that leads to life. [Isa 55:7-8]

For it is written in Matthew 7:

[14] ***Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.***

[13] ***For wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many are those who walk on it.***

Let us turn to the text we have just read together. The Lord Jesus complained at that time that people had searched the scriptures, day and night if you like, but they had not come to him. [Joh 5:39-40] They criticized him. Let us think of the scribes who had indeed studied them; their minds were not open to understanding what was happening at that time.

You see, God sent his prophet named John, and in the Gospel of John, in chapter 1, there is this wonderful sentence: "***There was a man sent from God, whose name was John***." [Joh 1:6]

There were many schools of thought; there were men who had been trained in this or one of these directions and had committed others to this path. But then, when the time was fulfilled, God acted, God spoke, and simply placed what he had promised right in the midst of the people. And whoever wished to believe could do so, whilst those who did not simply passed by this work of God.

And I ask you now, what would your reaction have been? Would you have remained with the tradition, with the beautiful customs, with the solemn services, or would you have had the courage to go out into the wilderness of Judea to hear a man who

was no theologian, who wore no robe, who had no turned-around collar, a man of the desert, wrapped around with a camel skin, with a leather belt around his waist, a man of whom one might generally have said, "This man has nothing at all to say to us. Where was he trained? To which school of thought does he belong?"

You see, ladies and gentlemen, God's ways are very different from our ways.

What is important is that we recognize God's way with people in these days and are then also prepared to leave behind inherited traditions, make our decision for the Lord, and move forward with God.

This morning, we simply have the topic "The Church of the Living God, the promises God has given," and so on. I would like to continue reading, specifically a number of scriptures. The next one from 1 Timothy, chapter 3. 1 Timothy, chapter 3, verse 15. I assume that most of us are familiar with these scriptures. I'm reading from Dr. Hermann Menge translation; linguistically, I find it the most pleasant. 1 Timothy, chapter 3, verse 15.

[15] ***But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.***

The church of the living God cannot exist in lies and deceit; it cannot be founded on human words. The church itself is both the pillar and the foundation of the truth. It is therefore the bearer of divine truth. And Jesus said, "***Whoever is of the truth hears my voice***." [Joh 18:37]

And he said, "***Whoever follows me will not remain in darkness, but will have the light of life***." [Joh 8:12]

So the early church, which must indeed remain as it was in the beginning until the end. For you see, with God, everything remains as it was called into being in the beginning. Even in the natural creation, everything has remained the same. The wheat that grew in Adam's time grows today, the same trees, the same fruit, the whole of creation; everything remains within the divine order into which things were placed from the beginning, and everything brings forth after its kind.

Nor can anything change in the church of the living God, for Jesus is building his church. If Methodists, Baptists, and others build, then things may turn out quite differently, but we are interested in this: what is the church and who belongs to it?

That is surely the big question today. Firstly, it is clear from this passage that the church of God is at the same time the house of God. God wanted to dwell and walk among us. Just as God revealed himself personally in Christ, so he wishes to reveal himself in the church and through the church.

But this church must be permeated by divine truth and must itself have become the bearer, the pillar and foundation of divine truth.

And this divine truth is indivisible; it cannot be mixed; it remains to the end what it was in the beginning.

To emphasize this clearly, I would like to read a few scriptures that show us the sidetracks that emerged right from the start.

Even in early Christianity, or a few years after the church was founded, there were already men who preached a different gospel, who put forward their own teachings that no longer corresponded to the original divine revelation. And Paul had already taken issue with this. There is this very compelling passage from 2 Corinthians, chapter 11, verse 4.

[4] ***For if he that cometh preaches another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.***

Now imagine: shortly after the founding of the New Testament church, where everything was of divine origin, no presentation of one's own thoughts or doctrines, but truly a divine organism brought into being by God himself as a church, as a place of the Lord's revelation.

The day of Pentecost remains of course universally remembered, for that was the day the New Testament church was founded. But as already mentioned, deviations arose very early on.

And if I must make this observation today with a heavy heart, I ask that you understand it correctly.

Today we are dealing almost exclusively with deviations. The proclamation of the original gospel and the pure divine doctrine and practice of the early church is after all unknown.

Today the deviations are presented as the correct way, and the original proclamation in the apostolic manner and according to the apostolic pattern is swept aside by today's experts and regarded as heresy.

What is heresy? A teaching that leads astray. And therefore, here too, one must state very clearly and recognize that everything must be tested against the Word.

Already in the first church age message, in Revelation 2, to the church at Ephesus, we read, "***You have tested those who claimed to be apostles and found them to be liars***." [Rev 2:2]

Why? How could one tell the difference? How can one know: is it true or is it not true, is it right or is it not right?

One has a very good means of comparison if one takes the Holy Scripture as the foundation, as the standard, by which everything must be measured.

Not what was introduced at some point, but what was given by God in the beginning. "***In the beginning was the Word***." [Joh 1:1]

I shall continue reading from Galatians 1, a passage surely very familiar to us all.

Here we are told, specifically in verse 6: "***I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel***." [Gal 1:6]

But in fact, there's only one gospel, the gospel of Jesus Christ, of which Paul says, "***according to my gospel***." [Gal 1:7]

But there were people who twisted the original gospel to suit their own purposes, who gave the original gospel a private interpretation, and thus deviated from what God intended.

Now you might say: Is that really so bad? It is more than bad. There is no human being who has the right to alter God's Word in the slightest.

Our Lord said in Matthew 5, with reference to the Old Testament, that "***not one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass***." [Mat 5:18]

He said, "***Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away***." [Mat 24:35]

The slightest alteration of the original Word carries within it spiritual death.

And I would like to give the example from the Garden of Eden, for that is where it all began.

God had said, "***You may eat from every tree in the garden, but not from this one tree***." [Gen 2:16-17]

You can read it for yourselves. When Satan spoke through the serpent, he turned it the other way around and said, "***Has God said you must not eat from any tree?***" [Gen 3:1] Just a slight alteration.

And then came the addition: "***You will by no means die***." [Gen 3:4]

But God had said, "***On the day you eat of it, you will surely die***." [Gen 2:17]

Firstly, Satan twisted the words, and secondly, he said, "***You will not die. God knows that you will then be wise***." [Gen 3:4-5]

What use is wisdom if it brings spiritual death and destruction awaits us?

Just as we have read in the Word: "***Ye search the scriptures, thinking that in them you have eternal life; yet you refuse to come to me***." [Joh 5:39-40]

God's Word must be preserved in its original form. And the entire testimony of God's Word has its central point Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, of whom it is

written: "***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.***" [Joh 1:1]

"***And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory.***" [Joh 1:14]

The matter is very serious. In the original Word was eternal life, fellowship with God. Adam and Eve would have known nothing of death, sickness, hardship, pain, or suffering had they not transgressed the Word, disregarded it, and listened to the influence of the enemy.

It can therefore rightly be said: whoever abides in the Word of God abides in God. Whoever departs from the Word moves out of the divine realm.

Jesus said in John 15: "***If my words remain in you, and you remain in me...***" [Joh 15:7]

This is the divine structure. For everything comes to be through the Word; without it, nothing that has come to be has come to be. [Joh 1:3]

We must therefore distinguish where we are dealing with a true proclamation of the original Gospel of Jesus Christ with the apostolic teaching and practice for the church, and where we are dealing with traditions introduced by men.

Christ is not necessarily present simply because people say Christ is here and Christ is there.

He is present where his Word is respected. Indeed, where he himself speaks and can address us.

In Titus, I would like to read first from Titus chapter 2. Here we are told that we must remain in sound doctrine. [Tit 2:1]

I would now like to read several Scriptures quickly so that you know that it is not I who am saying this but that God's Word instructs us very clearly and plainly on this matter. Titus chapter 2, verses 7 and 8.

[7] ***In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity,***

[8] ***Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.***

Sound doctrine makes the person who hears the Word sound. Doctrine that is sick, that is sick at its core, makes people spiritually sick, leads them astray, destabilizes them. So, "***in doctrine showing uncorruptness.***" [Tit 2:7]

2 Timothy chapter 3, verse 10.

[10] ***But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience...***

Then verse 14:

[14] ***But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them;***

[15] ***And that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.***

[16] ***All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:***

[17] ***That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.***

One cannot simply say that doctrine is unimportant. The most important thing is our personal experience of salvation. That is true. But then we have read in 2 Corinthians chapter 11 that "***another Jesus is being preached, another spirit is being received, another gospel is being preached.***" [2Co 11:4]

Yes, and if it is the case that everything has changed and no longer remains as it was originally, then we have the urgent task today of searching the Scriptures with all earnestness, as those in Berea did, to know whether things are so [Act 17:11], or whether we have fallen for the enemy's tricks and hold things to be true that are simply not true, or regard things right that are not right.

From 2 Timothy I read from chapter 4. 2 Timothy chapter 4, verses 3 to 5.

[3] ***For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to them teachers, having itching ears;***

[4] ***And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.***

[5] ***But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.***

The time will come, as we have read here, and the time has come. Ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, every time I read this Scripture, I'm deeply moved. For me, when it comes to assessing a matter, it is probably the most significant Scripture in the entire Bible. And I do not wish to withhold it from you, whether you choose to believe it or not.

But I have indeed heard the voice of the Lord several times in my life. I say this with an open Bible before God, who will one day judge the living and the dead. I know the place, I know the time, I know what the Lord said. It is now almost 8 years since the Lord last spoke to me: "Gather unto me my people."

And anyone who has read the circular letters knows the details. Sometimes it saddens me that I have not heard the Lord's voice for years. I admit that openly. But God is God. I cannot tell him what to do. If I am his servant, then I do not rule over him, but he rules over me.

But it happened in the French port city of Marseille, when I was preaching the Word there years ago. It was on a morning. I looked at my watch after the experience. It was 5 minutes to 5 in the morning when this experience was over. I was awakened by the loud voice of the Lord, which always comes from the top right, never from the left, never from behind, from the top right, and I was told: "Get up and read 2 Timothy chapter 4."

I hesitated for just a moment. It was cold in the room and I wasn't sure whether I should put on a little clothing. And in that moment of my hesitation, the voice of the Lord came a second time, but more powerfully: "Get up and read 2 Timothy chapter 4."

I jumped up, of course, took my Bible, which was lying on the small table, and read from verse 1 to verse 5. And then I started again from verse 1. And when I came to verse 2, I received the answer and knew why I had been asked to read this Scripture. It says here: "***Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine.***" [2Ti 4:2]

My direct task, in accordance with the divine calling of the 2nd of April 1962, is the direct proclamation of the Word of God. I'm not here to tell stories or to present parables. I'm here to preach the Word of God that remains forever and to do so exactly as it has been handed down to us.

When we speak of the Lord's church, which is indeed the foundation and pillar of the truth, we must also agree that, as bearers of the divine truth entrusted to us, we cannot tolerate, permit, or even promote any mixing of it. [1Ti 3:15]

If God has destined us to be bearers and transmitters of his divine truths, let us take on this task together and ask God from the heart that he may baptize us through his Spirit into his body [1Co 12:13], into the church, that indeed nothing human, let alone things of the enemy, may creep in and gain ground in the Lord's church, but that God himself may, at the very end of days in which we now live, once again bring into being a church that is equal to the early church in doctrine and life, in practice and in all that goes with it.

You will find that there are promises regarding this in the Holy Scripture. Now two or three Scriptures concerning the church. From Hebrews chapter 12, I would like to read verses 22 to 24. Hebrews chapter 12, verses 22 to 24.

[22] ***But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,***

[23] ***To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written***

in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,

[24] ***And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.***

Here too, we hear of the "***church of the living God***", of the "***firstborn whose names are written in heaven***".

Not merely members of a church or a denomination or any other faith, but those who have the certainty of faith that their names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, that they have been born again, that they are not merely children of men, but have become children of God through a personal experience of salvation with Jesus Christ, our Lord.

I believe such Scriptures are very important. When it says here: "***You have come to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,***" did not Paul say "***we are strangers and sojourners here***"? [Heb 11:13]

Our true homeland is indeed up there. It is already written of Abraham that he "***lived in tents and looked for the city***", look it up in Hebrews 11, that "***he looked for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God***." [Heb 11:9-10]

But here lies a mystery. This new Jerusalem, this city of God, is associated with the church of the firstborn. And the firstborn share in the first resurrection. And that is why it is written in Revelation chapter 20: "***Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power.***" [Rev 20:6]

In Revelation 21 verse 9, we are told the following. Revelation 21:9:

[9] ***And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.***

[10] ***And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,***

[11] ***Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.***

We cannot read entire chapters here. What is important is that we recognize that God has accomplished salvation in Christ. Christ was the firstborn among many brethren. [Rom 8:29]

All who are born again to this living hope through the divine seed of the Word and through the Holy Spirit are also grafted into the body of the Lord by the Holy Spirit according to 1 Corinthians chapter 12, verses 12 and 13.

Here, after the marriage supper and after a 1000 years, the bride is then referred to as the wife of the Lamb. In Revelation 19 we read or hear the term "bride" again. I shall read verse 7. Revelation 19 verse 7:

[7] ***Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his bride hath made herself ready.***

Beloved, I have no choice. By God's commission, I must tell the people the truth. I must also include in my proclamation the promises and prophecies given for our time, for these last days. We need divine, spiritual guidance. We need direction from heaven. We must be able to read the signs of the times and must realize what a grave hour in human history we have actually arrived at.

I'm not exaggerating when I say that based on the fulfillment of Bible prophecy, we can expect the return of Jesus Christ very soon. Truly, very soon. And I do not shy away from this. Whoever wants to argue, don't argue with me; argue with God and God's Word, but not with me. I have not written these things. I have not said them. I'm merely passing them on.

And we shall indeed examine a number of Scriptures that also shed light on this matter so that we may know and recognize that we are now living not merely in the end time, but at the very end of the end times.

I would like to read just two Scriptures on this subject at the moment, because this is not our topic today, but simply to bring it to your attention. In the Gospel of Matthew chapter 24, our Lord did indeed speak of the end time, of many false prophets, false Christs, and so on, who would come and lead many astray. He warns us not to follow them. And here we may again give the warning that everything that happens must be tested, and that is to be done by the Word of God.

Not from our own perspective, but whoever wishes to test and determine divinely whether something is true must stand on the foundation of God's Word and judge everything from a divine perspective.

But please listen to what the Lord clearly says here. Matthew 24 verse 8. Perhaps very briefly from verse 6 as well.

[6] ***And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.***

Let us please note the exact wording: "***for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.***"

[7] ***For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.***

And now comes verse 8.

[8] ***All these are the beginning of sorrows.***

Not yet the end. The prelude to the end. The beginning of birth pangs.

Paul looked to the end of this age in which we live and writes to the Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians 5, in verse 3:

[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.***

The Lord Jesus spoke generally of the prelude to the end times, of wars and rumors of wars. And we have seen it all. One continent has been ravaged by war, another by floods, a third by earthquakes; disasters of every kind have indeed come upon this earth, and they will only increase. But when it comes to what will happen right at the very end, it is no longer "***war and rumors of wars***", but "***peace and safety***." [Mat 24:6, 1Th 5:3]

Where God's Word enters into the political process even slightly, we too must and may necessarily enter into this process and observe it. I am no prophet, but by the grace of God I have also been given the prophetic part of the plan of salvation by the Lord. There is no one who can take anything for themselves unless it is given to them by God. [Joh 3:27]

All those who have known me for many years know that I predicted the reunification of our country many years ago.

And when Mr. Gorbachev came to power in the Soviet Union—I believe it was in 1985—I said: "this is the man after God's own heart."

And if you have all been following this, dear listeners, how many peace and disarmament conferences there have been since then. And it was he who courageously put forward proposals, and we see that the development that came from the people has overwhelmed the politicians.

It was no longer the politicians in recent years, and especially in recent months, who have been making policy; the politicians have struggled to keep up with what was happening amongst the people and what was happening through the people, whether on the streets or elsewhere.

Why is all this the case?

As I said, that is not quite our topic this morning; this afternoon we will have to delve into these matters to show you clearly how Bible prophecy is being fulfilled in this as well, whether you believe it or not. But even the last book of the Bible was until recently a book sealed with seven seals. [Rev 5:1]

And anyone who has read church history will find that Martin Luther in particular, the greatest man our country has ever produced, could make no head or tail of the book of Revelation.

He even had reservations at first about including it in the Bible. What was it? Of course, it is a mysterious book. And whilst the time had not yet come, people could not yet comprehend these things; there was no access to them, only when certain events in the kingdom of God and in general, which were foretold in Bible prophecy, come to pass—only then does God open our understanding to them and only then can we place all these things in their biblical context as planned by the Lord and foretold in his Word.

Into the church of the Lord various ministries have been set for its edification. I shall read from 1 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 28.

1 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 28, here it says:

[28] ***And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles…***

We are after all speaking today about the New Testament church in its original purpose and structure, as God conceived and planned it.

I would like to ask you, my esteemed listeners, where is there a church today in which the truly biblical ministries exist? Not someone who says that a few tablets were brought down by an angel from heaven on such and such mountain and that I copied them down and then the angel took them back again and I fooled the people. I am not speaking of that. I am not speaking of people who present themselves as prophets. When the Word of God speaks of prophets, of prophets or apostles and teachers who were set into the church, then I am not speaking of fantasists who had an idea at some point and then present it to the people. We do not need an angel to come down from heaven with tablets to bring us something else.

God has forgotten nothing; on the contrary, God has even pronounced a curse upon anyone who would add anything to the completed testimony of Holy Scripture.

And this is written very clearly in the last chapter of the New Testament. Allow me to read it. Revelation 22, verse 18.

[18] ***For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book.***

Adding anything is fatal. It is simply fatal. God has forgotten nothing; there must be no one who says: hold on a moment please, there is still something missing. Nothing is missing. We have the Old and the New Testament and both are complete.

And Paul even went so far as to say that no one has the right to add anything to a testament [Gal 3:15] — even with an earthly will it would be criminal if after the death of the person who made it, someone were to write in it and add whatever they please.

And with God's will are we to be allowed to add to it? That is something one ought to give some thought to.

The divine testament became legally binding through the one who established it, and that is Jesus Christ, our Lord. And he said at the last supper: "***this is the new covenant in my blood.***" [Mat 26:28, Luke 22:20]

He made a testament, that is why we have the Old and New Testament. God has forgotten nothing.

Thus, through false interpretation and false inspiration, many things have crept in which do not belong in the original proclamation, let alone in the church of the living God.

So God has set into the church prophets, teachers, apostles and so on. I shall also read from Ephesians chapter 4, verses 11 and 12. It speaks of Jesus.

[11] ***And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;***

Now comes the reason.

[12] ***For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.***

The Lord's church forms the body, which consists of many members; and these ministries have been established for spiritual edification.

Not everyone can be a prophet, not everyone an apostle—that is determined by God. And there is no one who would say of themselves: 'I am a prophet' or 'I am an apostle'—here you could just say: forget it. There are only ministries, there are only ministries that God has set into the church, but no one who could lift up their nose and say of themselves: 'I am this or that'.

I would like to read from Matthew chapter 23, for the purpose of showing us that prophets and ministries were also foretold for the New Testament, even by our Lord. Matthew 23, verse 34:

[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:***

I do not know why this is so, but you can read on in this chapter.

True believers have always been persecuted, stoned and killed.

Precisely because they were bearers of divine truth. Here our Lord says:

[35] ***That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of***

Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

Throughout the ages, people have listened to false prophets because they proclaimed things to people that appealed to them. The true prophets, who on God's behalf proclaimed the pure Word of God, the truth, were always persecuted, always stoned, and so on. Nevertheless, the Lord has promised: "***I will send you prophets***", as we have read. [Mat 23:34]

And specifically—and I ask that you take this very seriously now, not for my sake but for your own, for it is not just about my salvation but ultimately also about your salvation, if you are serious about eternity. Because we have now entered a prophetic sequence—that is to say, a period in human history in which Bible prophecy is being fulfilled. A prophetic ministry was required to proclaim the prophetic Word, which is now highly topical in its divine significance and also to place it in the proper context.

It is not enough today for me to put on a cassock or perhaps turn up as a Hollywood evangelist, spouting grand words, speaking of healing and many other things and then leaving the hall and the venue.

People have a right, a God-given right, to be informed, to hear the truth, to learn about the fulfillment of Bible prophecy. We cannot simply play at being religious a little, listen to a lovely service accompanied by grand organ music whilst singing, wait for the amen and then hurry home.

God has more in store for us. And just as it was at the first coming of Christ—I believe it is very important that this be said—if Dr. Larkin's calculations are correct, 109 prophecies from the Old Testament were fulfilled at the first coming of Christ. Everything, absolutely everything was foretold from his birth to his ascension; his ministry, suffering and death—every single detail was foretold in Bible prophecy concerning the first coming of Christ.

And now I ask you, ladies and gentlemen, dear listeners, dear brothers and sisters: should not the scribes of that time have recognized that so much Bible prophecy, which they were indeed familiar with yet failed to understand its fulfillment, had been fulfilled in their own time?

And one might shake one's head today and ask: how was it possible, how was it possible—by God in heaven—that people on earth who sing their hallelujah, who hold their service, who offer their sacrifices, who can sing every psalm and with drums and trumpets, bypassing what God has done?

Was it so or was it not so? Our Lord said: "***how often I have wanted to gather you together as a hen gathers her chicks—yet you were unwilling.***" [Mat 23:37]

It is incomprehensible that people, indeed the people of Israel, the people of God—today one would say Christianity—that the spiritual leaders lack insight.

But look, God always does his things in his own way. He sends one of his servants and prophets to speak directly and reveal what is at stake and what is to come.

There was Noah, there was Abraham, Moses, Elijah—there have been men of God in every age whom the Lord has used in a special way, through whom he could speak, through whom he could work and also reveal what would happen or what is happening.

And if at the first coming of Christ so many prophecies were fulfilled and Bible prophecy took its course, yet the spiritual leadership still failed to see it, then it makes no sense for us today to sit in judgment over them, but rather to beat our chest and ask the question: have I understood God in his dealings in the present day?

Do I see the prophetic unfolding of the Word of God? Did we understand? To judge what was not recognized back then is of no use to any of us today; we must simply learn the lesson so that we do not make the same mistakes.

Back then, a man sent by God appeared.

I love that saying. There were many men who read from the Torah, many who observed their worship every Sabbath, and the Lord had to say, Mark 7 verse 7:

[7] ***In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.***

And then it goes on: "***This people honoureth me with their lips, but not with their heart.***" [Mat 15:8, Mar 7:6]

There is so much in Christianity today, and I am not passing judgment; I myself wish for my connection with God to become even more intimate. I am not here as a critic. I stand here with deep sorrow in my heart, for I myself wish to be saved and wish that all who hear and believe God's Word may likewise be saved.

But the point is simply that we must be brought into connection with God. There are people—I know a bit about this myself—who say: 'I am in connection with such and such an evangelist'. You know the sort of thing people say.

Then my heart aches all over again. We are not connected to a person; we need the connection to God.

This connection is simply urgently necessary. God can use people. And this afternoon, I may mention brother Branham, whom God used in a special way.

And if I may just add this here: when we think, for example, of the pre-reformation or even the reformation itself, which then took its course, there is no other way about it: people whom God used are mentioned.

I was in Czechoslovakia last weekend, and lo and behold, they were celebrating Hus; they were commemorating the anniversary of the death of the pre-reformation figure

Jan Hus, who was burned at the stake in Constance, and it has become a public holiday throughout the country.

There were men whom God used, whether it was Hus there, Martin Luther here, Erasmus in Rotterdam, Calvin in Geneva, Zwingli in Zurich, or Wycliffe in England.

There were men; and later on, whether it was John Wesley, William Booth or many others, there were men in church history, just as there were prophets and apostles, so there were men whom God could use in their time.

One could speak of Spurgeon, of Moody, of Finney, of many others. That is not our task. I mention it only that it is indeed possible that we look to the past and see what happened, yet fail to recognize what God is doing now. We are living now, and we must be brought up to date in accordance with Bible prophecy in the kingdom of God, so that we may now recognize what God is doing in our time.

It is absolutely not enough to recognize the past; and in this regard, this man of God truly spoke a fitting word: "people always praise God for what he has done in the past, and they praise him for what he will do in the future, but they overlook what he is doing at present."

It is absolutely essential that we now connect with God's Word, that we are brought into step, into harmony with God and God's Word, so that we may then witness the completion and at the Second Coming, at the Lord's return, experience the transformation and the rapture.

Let no one imagine that they could join in at some point whenever it suits them. God's cause and the things that happen in the kingdom of God follow a certain progression. You know, of course, what is written in Luke 16:16: "***The law and the prophets were until John; since then, the kingdom of God has been proclaimed.***"

And then it also says: "***it suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.***"

One must be brought into the kingdom of God in order to even be able to ascertain what is going on in the kingdom of God. If I had not come into this banquet hall, I would not know what is going on here. One must get involved in the matter to know what is happening, let alone to then also have a share in it. Those who stay outside are left puzzling; those who are inside grasp the issues at stake.

Believe me, everything is at stake. And now it really matters, and I do not wish to cause fear, I simply must be able to stand before my conscience and before God, and that is why I must draw attention to these things, that the church of the living God is now about to experience its completion.

For we are very close to the return of Jesus Christ our Lord. And we have read it in Revelation 19: "***His bride has made herself ready and to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white.***" [Rev 19:7-8]

God has a plan for the people of Israel; indeed, the fig tree has been given as a symbol in Holy Scripture. The return is one of the surest signs that we are now living in the end times. And the Lord said: "***When you see all these things coming to pass, lift up your heads, for you know***"—not that you suspect, not that you think, but "***you know that your redemption is drawing near.***" [Luk 21:28]

Blessed be the name of the Lord for such words.

But this, too, is something we would like to discuss this afternoon with God's help, namely how Bible prophecy is unfolding in our own day in this regard.

This morning, it is simply a matter of first knowing what and who the church of the living God is. We have read the Scriptures on this. It is called the church of the firstborn; Christ, the firstborn, we, the firstborn. He, begotten of the Spirit; we, begotten of the Spirit and born again unto a living hope. [1 Pet 1:3] He, the firstborn among many brethren [Rom 8:29]; in him and through him, the divine beginning of the new creation has been made.

And that is why it is written in Revelation chapter 3, in verse 14, of the final church age message, that he is "***the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.***" [Rev 3:14]

He is the second Adam; there was the first Adam and the humanity that followed from him. There is the second Adam, Jesus Christ our Lord. Just as he was conceived by the Spirit and then born, so too must we be conceived by the Spirit and born again unto a living hope. Human children must become children of God.

His Spirit must be able to bear witness to our spirit that we have become children of God. [Rom 8:16]

In the Gospel of John, chapter 1, it says: "***But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become children of God, even to them who believe on his name.***" [Joh 1:12]

"***If we are children***", Paul writes, "***then we are also heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ.***" [Rom 8:17]

As believers, we have a great future; the unbelievers have no future at all. They have no living hope, and that pains us deeply; we feel sorry for them. But I believe that God will still bring in a great harvest and that many more—I do not wish to say millions, though I wish it were so; I wish there were millions who will become believers before the time of grace comes to an end and God's judgments fall upon this earth.

It will come to pass that the day of grace will come to an end and that the Lord will return to take his own into glory, and that then the great and terrible day of the Lord will dawn and people will be filled with fear here on this earth.

The church of the living God, the multitude redeemed on the cross of Calvary, those who have accepted and received Jesus Christ and have received eternal life through him.

There's no need to philosophize when it is said that only those who have eternal life can live forever. Only those who have eternal life can live forever, and there's only one form of eternal life, and that is the life of God. God is from eternity to eternity; he has no beginning, he has no end.

God revealed himself in Jesus Christ our Lord, and so the following is told to us in 1 John chapter 5, verse 20.

1 John chapter 5, verse 20:

[20] ***And we know that the Son of God is come, and has given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.***

In the same chapter, verse 11 states, 1 John chapter 5, verse 11:

[11] ***And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.***

[12] ***He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.***

How serious are such words; not a religious act, not a conversion from Catholicism to Protestantism, not a switching from one church to another—that will not do it. A conversion to the living God in the name of Jesus Christ with all one's heart, with all one's mind and deeds, indeed with one's whole life. Only in this way will God be able to begin with us.

The first step must be taken. We can read in Philippians that "***God will bring to completion the work he has begun unto the day of Jesus Christ.***" [Php 1:6]

But if it has not yet begun, how can it be completed? First, God must be able to make a start, then there must be a continuation following the start, and only then can there be completion.

How can a person experience completion if nothing has even begun? Anyone who reads the account of creation will find that it is written: "***And on the seventh day God finished his work and rested from all that he had done.***" [Gen 2:2]

But there was a beginning, a continuation, and then completion. In our personal lives, too, God must be able to make a beginning; we must know of a day and an hour in our lives when this beginning, this encounter with God, this conversion, this enlightenment by heavenly light, this turning towards the Lord took place.

So that we may say with Paul: "***I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God.***" [Gal 2:20]

This is not about a doctrine, an idea, or a realization; this is about God, it is about eternal life, about our salvation. And that is why the proclamation of the true Word of God is so important.

Now coming back to the course of the times in which we live. I have said time and again that I don't like to go into this this morning, but let me state it clearly: it was not only the fig tree that was spoken of, but all the other trees as well. You can read this in the Gospel of Luke chapter 21; and if the fig tree, following the Old Testament pattern or symbolism, referred to the people of Israel, then all the other trees refer to all the other nations.

Please allow me to read it to you, Luke 21 from verse 29:

[29] ***And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees;***

[30] ***When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand.***

[31] ***So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.***

If you wish to know the parable from the Old Testament, it is Hosea chapter 9, verse 10; there Israel is already compared to the fig tree as a symbol in Bible prophecy.

Whether you know this or not, but since the days of Nebuchadnezzar, the people of Israel have been scattered to the four corners of the earth. And since Titus laid siege to Jerusalem in the year 70 AD, the end had come and the final and definite scattering throughout the world had begun.

But God has said in Bible prophecy, "***in the latter days I will bring you back from all the nations into your own land.***" [Eze 36:24] I have written about this and there are indeed many scriptures on the subject.

Now when the fig tree is spoken of here as the people of Israel and of the other trees that will blossom, I would just like to point out very briefly what happened after the Second World War: the whole of Asia, the whole of Africa freed itself from the yoke under which the individual countries had been. Everything became independent and gained sovereignty.

When I think that at the time of the Second World War, there were exactly 49 nations under the British crown, and since then they have all become independent, all have blossomed, all have cast off the yoke, have become independent. Just as Israel became independent, since the 14th of May 1948 we have had the state of Israel. We have been told on several occasions how people sang and cheered in the streets of Jerusalem.

What are we witnessing in the very recent past? And I would like this to be noticed and for us to reflect on it.

Immediately after the Second World War, many nations threw off the yoke and became independent. Now at the end of this generation, this era, it is the last ones who are casting off the yoke and who simply because of Bible prophecy must now experience that they are not under another's rule but are receiving their sovereignty.

The fig tree and all the other trees would sprout; Israel and all the nations would break the yoke and gain their independence.

When I think of Bible prophecy, just two scriptures on this: one from the prophet Daniel, Daniel chapter 2, verse 21:

"***And he changeth the times and the seasons; he removeth kings, and setteth up kings; he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding.***" [Dan 2:21]

God arranges things: he removes kings, he sets up kings. Have we not seen in five countries of Eastern Europe in recent months how he removes and how he sets up? Everything that does not fit into the prophetic sequence must go, and what belongs there must come.

I have little to do with politics, virtually nothing, but when Mr. Honecker said during Gorbachev's last visit to Berlin last year, "the wall will stand for another 100 years", a sentence came to my lips that I shall never forget. And when Mr. Gorbachev then wrote the following in the guest book: "history punishes those who are late"; I added a second sentence and said, "it will punish you."

The fact is that time is running out. We have nothing against any individual; there were ideologies, and I make no secret of the fact that I too had to put on the Hitler uniform in the final months of the war. I know what kind of coercion and pressure was exerted; I do not wish to accuse anyone, that is not my style at all, because I have come to understand what totalitarian systems can entail. So please take no offense; we wish everyone God's blessing with all our hearts.

But we are grateful that the page of history has turned; we are grateful for the current developments. Nevertheless, it must be added that this is now the fulfillment of Bible prophecy.

The prophet Daniel, after all, saw four successive world empires, and the last of these was the Roman Empire. And anyone who is very well versed in history, I have even made a note of it myself, he knows that it was often referred to as the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.

The division that ran right through our country, right through Europe, had to be removed so that a Pan-European power could emerge upon which the religious power would later ride. Here, too, we cannot be any clearer or go into detail, but on the basis of Bible prophecy, we have spoken of these things, not because we have received

a special revelation, but because we have recognized the fulfillment of the revelation already given to us in the Word of God.

1957, I remember Mr. De Gaulle very well, a man who was of course very full of himself, who believed very much in himself and his grand nation. He said at the time in Rome that the aim was to create a united Europe stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals.

1957, at the signing of the treaties of Rome. Why the treaties of Rome? Why not the Washington treaty? Why not the Moscow treaty? Why the treaties of Rome? The Roman Empire as it was, encompassing the whole of Europe, must now be united.

And even the very same phrases that Mr. Gorbachev has now put forward and which many politicians have adopted; people speak of the Pan-European house in which there is room for everyone. One of our politicians even quoted John 14 in this regard and said: "***in our Father's house are many mansions.***" Can you imagine that? John 14, which truly has nothing to do with political developments; yet, he brought this scripture to his lips and applied it precisely in relation to the concept of the Pan-European house.

Why? Treaties signed in 1957, and we know that by 1992 everything is supposed to be settled.

A European Central Bank, European, European, European; why all this? Because it was foretold in Bible prophecy.

And what did we read earlier? When people say, "***peace and safety***" [1Th 5:3], haven't you read it in headlines?

Peace conferences, disarmament talks, security here in central Europe, away with the SS-20s, away with the missiles. Destroy the weapons. One could almost say that "***swords are being beaten into plowshares.***" [Isa 2:4, Mic 4:3]

Political and religious developments are taking their rapid course. It is our task to follow these events very closely, to observe their development, and to learn our lessons from them. Very soon, in the blink of an eye, this part of Bible prophecy will be fulfilled, and it will become the number one power on Earth. This United Europe we are talking about, and the peace that is now being fought for, disarmament, safety, these are also integral parts of Bible prophecy and its fulfillment.

I read the passage from the prophet Daniel earlier. I would like to read very briefly from Luke chapter 1, verse 52. Here it says:

[52] ***He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.***

God holds all things in his hand. Everything must go as he wills, as he has planned. Surely some will have already asked: why did this or that have to happen? Do not ask this question; it is not easy to answer. There are things that remain inexplicable

to us, mass murders in particular, such as what happened to the people of Israel, to the Jews, during the Third Reich. One might well ask as an unbeliever, an atheist once said: where was God when all this was happening? There are things that are incomprehensible to us as human beings. Perhaps God will give us the explanation in the hereafter.

Let us focus on the things God has ordained for us, which are now of the utmost urgency. I would like to briefly summarize what we have spoken about today. There was a variety of thoughts and scriptures. It is about the church of the living God, about the blood-bought multitude which will take part in the first resurrection. It is about their calling out, their preparation, and their completion unto the day of the return of Jesus Christ. It is about the teachings given at the beginning, and the practice of early Christianity regaining validity within the church of the living God. That with God's help, things are simply put in order as they were in the beginning. That is the main objective.

And then it's about Israel as God's natural covenant people, who have indeed returned from over 100 countries, and more and more are returning, especially from the Soviet Union. For there too, the Lord God will first call out 144,000 after the rapture through the ministry of the two prophets, until all Israel is saved.

And then it is a matter of recognizing politically what is happening now, the overall constellation. And you know full well that this is most evident right here among you, that men, religious men, have laid aside their robes and have moved entirely into politics. In the last days, it will indeed come to pass that the men of religion will engage in politics and the men of politics will engage in religion, that there will be a single unified whole. For one must be joined to the other, and thus they will work hand in hand. I can also tell you from the Holy Scriptures what will follow. Then comes the boycott, and then persecution will come upon all those who do not join this unified course and will not belong to them.

But we cannot go into these matters in greater detail today in this service. Believe me, we are living in the midst of the fulfillment of Bible prophecy, shortly before the return of Jesus Christ. We are witnessing the last generation, if I may put it that way. I'm not quite sure if it was McConnell [name unclear], one of the men from the Senate in Washington, who said quite frankly: "***we are the first generation that must realize that we are the last***".

So, God has made a beginning with the matters at hand whose fulfillment is imminent, and there will be an end to it. The only question is: on which side do we stand? Where will our end be? What will our end be like? The end is coming for everyone. For believers, it will lead to the first resurrection, transformation, and being taken up into glory. That is where our journey with God leads: to then be with the Lord forever.

But for the others, who have turned away from God and God's Word, there will be a terrible awakening. There will be the greatest disappointment. And indeed, as

our Lord said, there will be "***weeping and gnashing of teeth***". [Mat 13:50]

There will be reproaches of the worst kind, which people will direct at themselves and others. Namely, as it was in the days of Noah, the man of God preached year in, year out, long enough, and the people did not believe. And they did not notice until the day the flood came. [Mat 24:38-39] Even now, there are people who do not realize that there is a refuge and that destruction will soon come upon the earth. That is why God sends us this admonition, this urgent warning, to come to him to receive life, eternal life, and then also eternal bliss, so that we may be with God in glory for all eternity.

Finally, one might ask: who belongs to the church of the living God? Who is the possession of Jesus Christ, who has received forgiveness of their guilt and sin, who has the assurance of faith in their heart that they belong to the Lord? And the certainty that "***he who began a good work in you will perform it***" [Phl 1:6] unto the glorious day of his marvelous and wonderful return?

I pray for this, and I pray for all of us: may no one pass by the grace of God, that no one should perish but may all find the Lord, turn to him, and be saved. Jesus is coming soon; are we ready to meet him? Are we part of the church of the living God? Are we the bride to the bridegroom? Are we the body to the head? Many questions along these lines could be asked.

God sent us prophets and apostles. He sent his Word to heal us, to give us divine revelation. Blessed is the person who in this age "***hears what the Spirit says unto the churches***" [Rev 2, Rev 3].

Blessed is the person whose ears do not itch to hear something sensational, but who longs to hear the Word of the Lord. For thus it is written in the prophet Amos: "***the time will come when God will send a famine, a hunger to hear the Word.***" [Amos 8:11]

And this hunger will soon break out on a great scale, and many people will come to the Lord and be fed with the Word of life.

For "***man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.***" [Mat 4:4, Luk 4:4]

May his Word also have become our spiritual food by grace. To our God be all glory and praise, now and forever. Amen.