## **Last Great Day** "Snakes and Ladders"

Roy Assanti—October 20, 2011

Fred said in his message, 'Let's make sure that we're there.' He also talked about Rev. 22:18-19 where it talks about 'don't take away and don't add.' This is what it's about. That is a fitting start for basically the message that I have prepared

There was a minister that served in our area and he was someone we all loved; we really loved this fellow. Since then he's deceased, and we heard from his widow that heard of some thunderstorms in our area, and she basically was concerned and finally, I thought, we've got to contact her. I went back to her and naturally thought: Where are you? How are you? How are you doing? And I said, 'I'll send you some material.' It lasted for probably three months or so, and then I got an e-mail that she didn't want to be on the mailing list anymore:

Thanks for your thoughtfulness in sending me the material that you thought might be helpful to me, I do appreciate it.

However, I'm in a very different place now, completely all churched out. Please take me off the mailing list. It is good to know that you and everyone else is hanging together. Of all the many churches we were associated with during our 40 years in the Church was unique in that we were especially fond and proud of the young people there.

Church pastors come and go and it little or nothing to the congregation who the minister is, but the congregation are really important to the *resident pastor*.

I thought about that!

Usually, I know this is not always the case. I have met so many over the years only to see their own power trip, many of them in Australia.

We can identify with some of that in one way or another.

I wish you every good thing for the future. With affection to you all!

Just near me. There was also someone in the Church for a long time before me. We'd meet up every now and then, and I recall one time that we spoke for a little while and he calculated I think it was something like \$30,000 over the time he gave to the Church. He lamented over that. He said, 'You know, it really wasn't necessary.' The second time we met

he said, 'Sunday is all right.' I thought, 'Whoops!' I forget the rest of the conversation because it really didn't click with me.

Since that time, midway through this past year, this fellow died, and it left us thinking. Today, the last day of the Feast, the last message of the Last Great Day, what I want to do is zero in a little bit on that point of decision. What is it that happens? It's very important that we make sure we're there!

How do we come to understand God's Truth? *Faith comes by the hearing,* as the Apostle Paul tells us.

First we heard about it. Then we counted the cost. Why do we count the cost? Because of what was ahead of us, because there's no turning back! If we put our hand to the plow and we turn back, God has no pleasure in us. We've made a decision to go forward, and we need to continually go forward. Then we did two things: we repented and we were baptize and received the Holy Spirit. We rejoiced like finding a new love in our lives.

It was something that people couldn't point to. You couldn't describe it to anybody, but you had God's mind, you had fellowship—I know that I had fellowship as you had fellowship—with Jesus Christ and the Father. Something started, a journey on that bumpy road. It says that 'wide is the gate that leads to destruction,' but it's the narrow gate and a bumpy and difficult way to salvation!

- this process of repenting
- this process of following and obeying God
- this process of baptism via the Passover ceremony year-by-year

It has to happen every day, every month, every years of our lives. As it says, he who endures to the end, that one is the person who is going to be saved! That's what we need to bear in mind.

In all industries and trades or whatever there are basics. Like antiques, if someone said that they were going to open an antique store or factory and said, 'I'm, going to produce antiques,' what would you say? You can't produce antiques! Antiques are antiques! Fundamentals are fundamentals!

Example: When in sales you have to call on people. You have to talk to so many people, phone so many people and do so many adverts, otherwise no business! So, that's a certain fundamental in that trade.

With our chosen way of life, there are fundamentals, and we should never forget the fundamentals. Now, we're going to look at Matt. 13 in a slightly different way. We're used to looking at it in an ascending manner. There is also a descending way to look at it. I wonder if we have really thought about it as much as the other way.

Matthew 13:3: "And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, 'Behold, the sower went out to sow. And as he was sowing, some of the seed fell by the way; and the birds came and devoured them. And some fell upon the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up because the soil was not deep enough; but after the sun rose, they were scorched; and because they did not have roots... [deep enough] ...they dried up. And some of the seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. And some fell upon the good ground, and yielded fruit—some a hundredfold, and some sixtyfold, and some thirtyfold. The one who has ears to hear, let him hear" (vs 3-9). There's something basic in this message!

Now, there's something fundamental in v 12. Have a look at it; it's a principle that a lot hinges on

Verse 12: "For whoever has *understanding*, to him more shall be given, and he shall have an abundance, but whoever does not have *understanding*, even what he has shall be taken away from him."

Verse 23—we all have thought this is where we are: "But the one who was sown on good ground, this is the one who hears the Word and understands, who indeed brings forth fruit and produces—one a hundredfold, another sixtyfold *and* another thirtyfold."

I talked about ascending and descending almost like when we were young children and played the game of 'Snakes and Ladders'—there's a way up, but also there's a way down! If we look that, we need to understand that the person is in good soil until the end; it is he or she who endures to the end!

So, if you're in the good soil until the end of the race, they're the ones who make it. Is this me, I have to ask, or is this you?

Verse 22: "And the one who was sown among the thorns is the one who hears the Word, but the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches choke the Word, and it becomes unfruitful."

I'm going to tell you that that can happen to any one of us at any time. If we begin to stop doing the fundamentals, the basics, then we start going down the ladder at the first slip.

Verses 20: "Now, the one who was sown upon the rocky places is the one who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy; but *because* he has no root..." (vs 20-21).

Our roots can wither a little bit, and as soon as trials come up, we can fall away. That seems impossible. But how many people do you know that were in the Church, even elders, deacons and pillars in the Church, that you ask: What has happened to them?

This is incredible! They had it! Perhaps the explanation could be that they've gone down to the second slip, which is the second slip here. In other words, there doesn't take as much to get you off track.

Then we go down to the very worst, the third slip, v 19: "When anyone hears the Word of the Kingdom and does not understand *it*, the wicked one comes and snatches away that which was sown in his heart. This is the one who was sown by the way"—*the path!* 

What is it that the mind like the soil. A lot of you who have come from the land identify with that very well, indeed. The first thing you have to do with the soil to have it bring forth good fruit is you have to till it, break it up. How many of us were broken when we sought God's way. Then you become confident and everything is going great, and then you can slip down to the point where you are self-reliant, as many in the world are self-reliant and the seed doesn't penetrate.

That's a principle and it is he who endures to the end! The point is, we've talked about three slips. There's something about that #3, three going up and three going down—*Snakes and Ladders!* 

- What happens at that turning point, when the person who slips decides to slip?
- Do they want to slip?
- What happens?
- Does anybody know what happens?

I don't know! But we do have a clue!

We've been going through during this Feast the five wise and five foolish virgins.

Matthew 25:24: "Then the one who had received the single talent also came to *him and* said, 'Lord, I knew that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter. And *because* I was afraid, I went and hid your talent in the earth. *Now* look, you have your own" (vs 24-25).

• What do we see there?

- Do we see someone who turned around and said, 'Hey, I've given \$30,000, all this money. What for?'
- Do we really have to keep the Sabbath?

All this hardship; it was hard and difficult! A specific Biblical example in the life of Saul.

1-Samuel 13:5: "And the Philistines gathered to fight... [this was a test looming on Saul] ...with Israel, thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people like the sand on the seashore in multitude. And they came up and pitched in Michmash, eastward from Beth Aven. And the men of Israel saw that they were in a tight place (for the people were distressed). And the people hid themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits. And the Hebrews went over Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. And Saul was still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him, trembling. And he waited seven days..." (vs 5-8). What a test!

"...according to the set time with Samuel, but Samuel did not come to Gilgal. And the people were scattered from him" (v 8).

They were going. 'What am I going to do?' *Think about the situation that he was in!* 

Verse 9: "And Saul said, 'Bring a burnt offering here to me and peace offerings.'..." He had to wait!

Remember the last verses of the Bible, 'he who adds and he who takes away.' This was God's command at the time. Saul had to wait.

"...And he offered the burnt offering" (v 9). All he had to do is wait a little bit longer, and it could be that Samuel was just waiting there until God said to go. We know that God spoke to Samuel, and Samuel was probably waiting. Saul offered the sacrifices and Samuel came and Saul went out to meet him. You could tell there was a little bit of guilt there.

Verse 10: "And it came to pass as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came. And Saul went out to meet him and to kneel to him. And Samuel said, 'What have you done?'...." (vs 10-11).

Let's look at the attitude of Saul, that's what's important, what's going on in his life when the pressure is on.

"...And Saul said, 'Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and you did not come..." (v 11).

Why weren't you there on time, it's not my fault. He's kneeling down and was humble, but so

was the rich man; he didn't ask for a bucket of water or a glass of water even. He only asked for the little tip of moisture on his tongue. Maybe that had to do with the fact that in his lifetime that Lazarus only receive the crumbs of his table. He was humble, and so was Saul, kneeling and giving his excuses.

"...in the days appointed, and the Philistines gathered themselves at Michmash, and I said, 'The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the LORD'...." (vs 11-12). I'm going to be defeated! I'd better do it before they get me!

Well his eyes were off God and on the people, how many he had with him, what was against him, the physical stuff around him. *His eyes were not on God!* 

"...And I <u>forced</u> myself and offered a burnt offering.... [it wasn't easy but I had to do it] ...And Samuel said to Saul, <u>'You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God</u>, which He commanded you; for now the LORD would have established your kingdom upon Israel forever" (vs 12-14). *You failed the test!* 

That was a test of pressure on Saul. These are principles that we need to apply to our own lives. I know of someone who lost a son, and the son had four children. They were out, that threw them! I can't see in his mind, but that had to be a tremendous trial. Imagine that! 'God cannot be merciful if he's taken my son away.'

I know of someone else whose son tried to commit suicide and shot himself in the face. He lived, but had to have his face re-built, and now he himself has cancer. Guess what, the man is still there. Why does one go, judge God, and say 'You're harsh!' And somebody will say, 'Your will be done' and continue. It's the mystery of the mind; we've got to ponder that and reflect on ourselves.

These are deep things, it was not easy on Saul. It was a very difficult trial. God gave him another test, and easier test. It's a simple thing and no pressure.

1-Samuel 15:3—another instruction from God: "Now, go and strike Amalek, and completely destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman..."

That's a pretty hard call, maybe not for them back there, but probably for you and me.

"...infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and donkey" (v 3)—get rid of the lot, as if a tempest came over the land, an earthquake or whatever and just swallowed them up. What did Saul do?

Verse 4: "And Saul gathered the people together and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand footmen and ten thousand men of Judah."

Verse 7: "And Saul struck the Amalekites from Havilah, as you come to Shur, which *is* over across from Egypt. And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive. And he completely destroyed... [Did exactly what God said] ...all the people with the edge of the sword. But **Saul and the people**..." (vs 7-9).

He had a lot of people with him. Before he was concerned, because he didn't have a lot of people; he's looking at what's around him.

"...spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fatlings and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not completely destroy them. But everything that was vile and feeble they completely destroyed" (v 9).

In Saul's mind he listened to the people and probably said, Why do we have to kill these perfectly good sheep, these fantastic oxen? We'll kill them anyway by taking and sacrificing them, and we'll hack them up and eat them so they won't be a loss!

It was their own reasoning! The point is that sometimes our own reasoning make a lot of sense! It makes so much sense that it gets to the point that it doesn't seem that what God is saying to us makes any sense.

You take a look in this room and there's just under 20 people; that all! The big numbers are outside; the small numbers are inside. It's easy to see that sometimes we can be overwhelmed and overcome by our own reasoning. We have to look behind the scenes and recreate the situation that Saul was in. Saul believed everybody else. We say that everybody else is wrong, they're not in obedience to God.

Verse 10: "And the Word of the LORD came to Samuel saying, 'It repents Me that I have set up Saul to be king, for he has turned back from following Me and has not performed My commandments.".... [he did what he thought was right in his eyes and in the eyes of the people] ...And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the LORD all night" (vs 10-11).

God had made His mind up! This was the second test, the second time that Saul had failed! It was a different kind of pressure on him. He had had all the people away from him and then had all the people with him and he failed again. Saul did what he wanted to do!

Verse 20: "And Saul said to Samuel... [look

how he's reasoning]: ...'Yes, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have completely destroyed the Amalekites. But the people...'" (vs 20-21)—the people did it!

Doesn't it say in Revelation not to let anyone take your crown? If we turned around and said, 'But this minister taught me so much.' Wait a minute, Didn't I tell you not to let any man take your crown? Don't be led astray by people, things, anything!

I don't know where it changes, but this gives us a clue as to what goes on in the mind. Saul had God's Spirit, because God said that 'He took His Spirit from him.' So must have had it.

"...took from the spoil, of the flock and herd, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal" (v 21). We're going to kill them anyway, so kind of did what you said! But that wasn't what God said.

Verse 22: "And Samuel said, 'Does the LORD have as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice! To hearken is better than the fat of rams."

Verse 25—Saul sought repentance: "And now please pardon my sin... [I accept it, I got it!] ...and turn again with me so that I may worship the LORD."

What was he doing? He wanted Samuel's support in front of the people! He's still doing it wrong!

As we read on, especially in his conduct with David, we see that Saul really didn't repent! 'Is that my son David, you're more righteous than me. You could have killed me when you found me.' Saul let David go, but he was after his life again. The man didn't repent. It was the second time and it was enough for God. God could see that this man was not on the 'right wavelength.'

So, that's a negative example and it's not good to finish up on a negative, it's good to finish on a right example. Where is a right example that we can look at that somebody was pushed to the limit and he made it, he listened. We're going to look, of course, of the *father of the faithful*.

Throughout God's Word it's so interesting that He says, 'If you believe! If you believe Me, if you have faith, that's what counts.'

The rich man said, 'Send someone from the

dead. I've got five brothers and if they see someone come back from the dead, then they're going to repent and listen for sure.' He was told by Abraham that no they won't, because they forgot God's Word: the Law and the Prophets. That's the onus is on us; you don't have to be pressured to believe; you've got to believe! That's what counts, not the big deal miracles, not the fire from heaven. That's not what convinces! An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign!

The thing is, to discipline to take God's Word and hang onto it with 'white wrists' and not let it go. That's worth more than seeing someone seeing someone come back from the dead. That's the message; there are the principles that come through.

Genesis 11:30: "But Sarai was barren. She had no child."

Genesis 12:1: "And the LORD said to Abram, 'Get out of your country, and from your kindred..." All your family! Leave what you have!

It's hard to leave family and go to another country; to leave your children. In Abraham's case it was extended family because he didn't have children. It wouldn't be easy.

"...and from your father's house into a land that I will show you" (v 1).

Isn't that what we were told, the command that we had when we were baptized? We moved out of familiar into the unfamiliar! It wasn't an easy decision. It was the people who were around us whom we loved and suddenly not so much in sync with.

Verse 2—here's the promise: "And I will make of you a great nation. And I will bless you and make your name great. And you shall be a blessing. And I will bless those that bless you and curse the one who curses you. And in you shall all families of the earth be blessed.' Then Abram departed..." (vs 2-4). He just left!

'Well, I'm going to have children,' he thought! 'I didn't think I could have children.' *That was the promise!* 

Verse 4: "Then Abram departed, even as the LORD had spoken to him. And Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran."

When we are baptized and we begin our happy voyage. We're off to a new adventure! What happens?

Verse 9: "And Abram journeyed, going on toward the south. Now there was a famine in the land..." (vs 9-10).

I thought I was supposed to be blessed. He gets a famine! Not only that, he has to go down to Egypt and Pharaoh takes his wife Sari. Do you think Abram would be nice and comfortable sitting there while Pharaoh's got his wife? *It was a trial, a test!* Straight away it starts!

Genesis 13:7—another trial: "And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. And the Canaanite and the Perizzite lived in the land."

They had to depart from each other, because the substance was too great. By the way, Lot was a favorite of Abram's father, and with Abram, as well, because his father Haran died early. So, they had this affection, an affinity with blood. It was the only one of the family that Abram took, and he was taken away from Abram, as well.

Not only that, Lot took the best of the land. Does Abram say to God, 'You're not fair.' **NO!** He hung onto the promise!

Verse 9: "Is not the whole land before you? I pray you, separate yourself from me. If you go to the left, then I will go to the right. Or if you go to the right, then I will go to the left.""

He's trusting God! He's wasn't looking at the best or quantity, like Saul.

Verse 10: "And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was all well watered—before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah—like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you come to Zoar." So, Lot took the best of the land!

Genesis 15:1: "After these things the Word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Fear not, Abram, I *am* your shield and your exceedingly great reward.' And Abram said, 'Lord GOD, what will You give me since I go childless... [Abram's first solution] ...and the heir of my house *is* this Eliezer of Damascus?'" (vs 1-2).

How hard was it for Abram? He didn't have children and was offering Eliezer! He's trying to find a solution. God says, 'No, it's going to be someone from your own loins.'

Genesis 16:1—ten years pass: "Now Sarai, Abram's wife, did not bear him any children. And she had a maidservant, an Egyptian, and her name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, 'Behold now, the LORD has kept me from bearing. I pray you, go in to my maidservant. It may be that I may obtain children by her.' And Abram hearkened to the words of Sarai" (vs 1-2).

He listened to her, and that was the second solution! The first one was not right, but God had promised Abram. And solutions #2 was not right, as well.

Verse 3: "And Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maidservant, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife (after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan)."

Think of all the family feuds! We've heard of the Hatfields and McCoys in America that feuded for hundreds of years. But here, this is literally thousands of years and even to this day the descendants are still feuding. The hatred that was sown there, because Ishmael was basically kicked out by Sarah.

That was a mistake along the way, but still God was faithful and Abram didn't break his faith.

Genesis 17:17: "And Abraham fell upon his face and laughed..."

We hear about Sarah laughing, but here's Abraham laughing. Sometimes we laugh in our heart and we just can't help it.

"...and said in his heart, 'Shall *a child* be born to him that is a hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear?' And Abraham said to God, 'Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!" (vs 17-18).

Now it was Ishmael, that's the third solution! It's not easy! God wasn't specifically answering and they started to think and reason themselves. No different than Saul. He reasoned! He thought!

It's not wrong to reason and to think, *but it's* wrong to disobey God! God reassured Abraham, but said no!

Verse 19: "And God said, 'Sarah your wife shall bear you a son indeed. And you shall call his name Isaac.... [meaning *laughter*] ...And I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him."

Genesis 22:7: "And Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, 'My father.' And he said, 'Here I am, my son.' And he said, 'Behold the fire and the wood. But where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" He didn't say:

- the people
- you're not fair
- you reap what you didn't sow

Here's the character of someone who is sown in the 'good soil' that yielded: some 100, some 60, some 40. this is the characteristic, and shall we say,

fundamental, an antique, the attitude:

Verse 8: "And Abraham said, 'My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering.'.... [he knew] ... So, they both went on together."

Abraham raised the knife and was about to kill Isaac, believing that God would still bring him to life. He waited 25 years for that son, and now he's about to kill him! Can you imagine the test; God wasn't saying anything and Isaac was as good as dead!

Verse 11: "And the angel of the LORD called to him from the heavens and said, 'Abraham! Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' And He said, 'Do not lay your hand upon the lad, nor do anything to him... [don't touch him, leave him alone] ...for now I know that you fear God..." (vs 11-12).

God brings us to the point, He brings us with our backs to the wall at times. It's going to be that hard! It's just the way it is. He pushes us as far He has to—that's another fundamental—to know that we will be faithful regardless!

What if some people die early? *Not my decision and not yours; that's God's decision!* That's a big test, but to some He gives life.

There are many, many trials. I know that it's a struggle every day for some. The loss of a wife every day is just hard to go on. It's not easy, but as we have heard, the Kingdom of God is eternity! It's forever! It's where death and grave are burned up and finished! There's nothing left that can be destroyed!

<u>Is that worth it?</u> We always have to count the cost! We don't stop counting the cost!

At first I said, 'Let's be sure we're there.' Then I said to focus in to what happens at the turning point. I don't know, we could go one way or the other. If you turn away then you lose your life, but if you lose your life, then you gain it!

Matthew 7:24: "Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine and practices them, I will compare him to a wise man, who built his house upon the **rock**"—petra, a bolder!

When Jesus said to Peter, 'You are a rock—a petros' a small stone—that's what you are.' Then He said, 'Upon **this Rock**—this Petra, giant bolder...

Verse 25: "And the rain came down..."—
contemptuous came the rain, a torrent!

I saw pictures of a hurricane in America and there was this road a ravine, something like 15 meters down; it dug out the landscape. The water does a lot of damage and cut deep.

"...and the floods came... [you might have images of a tsunami] ...and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; but it did not fall, for it was founded upon the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not practice them..."(vs 25-26).

Bear in mind the examples, those turning points we looked at with Saul when he made a decision looking around him and *not looking at God!* 

"...shall be compared to a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand; and the rain came down, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell, and great was the fall of it" (vs 26-27).

There are many that look to ministers and other people and didn't look to God. Who knows, there's going to be a lot of people who say...

Verse 21: "Not everyone who says to Me "Lord, Lord" shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but the one who is doing... [until you die or until Christ comes] ...the will of My Father, Who is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord..." (vs 21-22).

Didn't we do these great things: I did the will of the Lord, I destroyed the Amalekites, but I brought back the king. I've destroyed all the cattle, but I brought back the best and they're just going to be slaughtered anyway.

## Same thing! Same attitude!

We are the Temple of the Lord and something is being built in us! It's compared to a treasure: diamonds, rubies, gold. We have something precious in us; *a treasure in earthen vessels!* The earthen vessel is the outside, and the treasure is on the inside.

The call and fundamental is: Who do you listen to? It depends on who you listen to whether you're going up or down. We've climbed up the ladder going back to the simple child's game: Snakes and Ladders.

We've climbed up the ladder to conversion! We should never ever forget that as we climbed up we can also go down! We have to strive to the day we die or until Christ comes to stay there in the good soil and we'll yield forth 100, 60 and 40!

## Scriptural References:

- 1) Matthew 13:3-9, 12, 23, 22, 20-21, 19
- 2) Matthew 25:24-25

- 3) 1 Samuel 13:5-13
- 4) 1 Samuel 15:3-4, 7-11, 20-22, 25
- 5) Genesis 11:30
- 6) Genesis 12:1-4, 9-10
- 7) Genesis 13:7, 9-10
- 8) Genesis 15:1-2
- 9) Genesis 16:1-3
- 10) Genesis 17:17-19
- 11) Genesis 22:7-8. 11-12
- 12) Matthew 7:24-27, 21-22

Scripture referenced, not quoted:

• Revelation 22:18-19

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