



Linking Shields

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Sabbath Sermon 01/24/2026

{NOTE: The actual oral sermon and video recording may vary significantly and even materially from these notes, but this “transcript” gives you a general idea of the direction of the message.}

{Title slide— 1} Shabbat shalom, brothers and sisters. It’s good to see you all! It was wonderful to watch you come together last week to rally around the LORD’s servant—our brother Micah—as he presented a message from the Word about unity in Mercy and Truth. It’s with such godly fellowship, which you displayed, that we can achieve victory over the attacks of the enemy. I praise God that His Holy Spirit was working together in this body, setting up the very message the LORD inspired me to present to you today. In alignment with our brother Micah’s message last week, the Sons of Korah explained in Psalm 85:10: “Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed.” I love this verse because it succinctly reflects the character of our God, which we ought to emulate. This delicate embrace between Mercy and Truth reminds those of us who follow Yeshua to focus on gathering and standing alongside other disciples committed to this balance while surrendering all judgment to God, because Yeshua uses “just scales” to weigh our hearts that we can trust. Our God is perfect in all His ways! Our calling as followers of Yeshua, then, is to point others to the Way of Messiah through Scriptural instruction and to live alongside one another according to Yeshua’s righteous example, while devoting ourselves to prayer, petitioning God to help us just as He promised. We link shields, so to speak, by practicing these things together while also encouraging, exhorting, and, when necessary, correcting one another along the way. In this fellowship, we can hold together a battle array that the enemies of God cannot breach, much like you see in the sermon image on the screen. My calling as your pastor is to take my stand along the frontline by sharing the Truth of the Word, living by it, and praying for you day and night, and I am certainly committed to doing this very thing. But as a man, I also need support from other leaders—support that God has graciously given to me—and I need support from each and every one of you here—the type I have already seen on display. Hallelujah! Praise be to God. Now, the battle array imagery you see here

wouldn't make sense if it only had one of us at the front of the array, or even if there was only one line of men at the front with no one behind them. While the battle array needs a frontline, the army of God that stands together includes each and every member aligned in faith and purpose, which makes the whole an impenetrable force willing and able to carry out God's will. We each have a function that strengthens us together as one body in Messiah Yeshua. Study 1st Corinthians 12 to further grasp what I'm saying. The image you see here, which was created by our brothers at The Bridge Fellowship in Brenham, Texas, visually expresses what I'm trying to explain. The logos you see on the shields in this image represent the ministries that are currently committed to Yeshua according to His Word. Each of our leaders shares the Scriptural testimony of the Gospel—that God's people endure in His Kingdom by keeping the commandments of God and an unwavering faith in Yeshua, who is our LORD and our God. This fellowship is essential for accountability and support—to hold the front line—so that we are all teaching the Truth of Scripture without wavering. The soldiers making up the bulk of the battle array in this image include each and every one of you and the members of all the various communities throughout our affiliate network. We are stronger together.

{New slide—2} As you may or may not know, I was in Brenham, Texas, last week at a three-day fellowship gathering of our affiliate church pastors as well as many others who were invited to join us. I intend to highlight some key takeaways from the conference in today's message. The first two days were designed for pastors; to encourage us to endure through the enemy's attacks against us and to remind us of our calling to train up disciples the LORD sends our way to live according to the Way of our King. Day one was exclusive for the pastors already united together in purpose and our teams. I pray you will come to know every one of these leaders and the rest of our teams as time goes on. From the left, pictured are pastors Mike Skahan, from Epic Life Church in Terrell, Texas; Mike Sutcliffe, from Corner Fringe Ministries in Dixon, Ill.; Lex Meyer, from Grafted Church in Oklahoma; Mike Slager, from First Fruits Fellowship in Indiana; Daniel Joseph, our lead pastor from Corner Fringe Ministries in Coon Rapids, Minn; Mike Comiskey, our host for the conference from The Bridge Fellowship in Brenham, Texas, and yours truly from First Fruits Ministries in New



From Left: Mike Skahan, Epic Life Church; Mike Sutcliffe, CFM Dixon; Lex Meyer, Grafted Church; Mike Slager, First Fruits Fellowship; Daniel Joseph, Corner Fringe Ministries; Mike Comiskey, The Bridge Fellowship; Andrew J. Manuse, First Fruits Ministries

Hampshire. For day two, there was an open invitation for all church leaders from everywhere to attend, and around 50 men and women came for some powerful direction from Pastors Mike Sutcliffe and Daniel Joseph. The third day was for everyone, and more than 500 people attended what was really a trumpet call to walk in the LORD's Truth because of the Mercy He has given us freely through Yeshua.

{New slide—3} Who knows what God is going to do as we seek to build His Kingdom together, but if last weekend was any indication, 1st Chronicles 7:14-15 presents the answer we should all continue to pray for. There we read: "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now," the LORD continues, "My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer made in this place." Whether we call ourselves Messianic or Christian, we are the people called by the name of our Messiah Yeshua—Jesus Christ, and it is His face we humbly seek through confession of our sins and repentance. It's His Way—His Mercy and Truth—that we ought to seek according to His Word through prayer, and He has promised to hear us when we do this. The LORD will even help us to endure in His righteousness when we turn to walk in it. This passage, which is God's recipe for true spiritual revival, contains all of the elements that we spoke about at our gathering, which was called "Raise the Standard." To remove all doubt, allow me to boldly proclaim that the Standard we were and will continue to be focused on is Yeshua and only Yeshua. He is the banner that we all must lift up and carry into battle! In Yeshua alone is the victory! What's remarkable to me is that our battle cry aligns perfectly with the sermon series we've been studying here at First Fruits Ministries, called "Who is Yeshua the Messiah?" The answer to this question for each of us you saw on the last slide is this: "Yeshua the Messiah is our LORD and our God." This is the first standard that rises above everything else, because the army of God cannot function without our risen King, the LORD of Hosts, who offers us mercy that we do not deserve so we can follow Him together as disciples who "love one another" into His Kingdom. Our calling is to lead all of you according to this Standard alone. And as we move with out with the LORD, our first call of duty is to humble ourselves before Him, asking Him to search our hearts for any unrighteous way in us and to remove it far from us—as far as the east is from the west. And when we seek and find the LORD's mercy together through such humility, our next call of duty is to align ourselves with our King—to love Him and put Him first. According to John 14:15-17a, Yeshua Himself said: "If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of Truth...." And this we ought to do, for how can we say we know Him if we don't keep His commandments? I ask you this:

Can an army survive if it doesn't follow the command of the King? Our willing obedience keeps our battle array together. We ought to walk just as He walked, so we can enjoy the same victory that He has made available to us all, which is resurrection from the dead into eternal life. And how did our King walk when He lived on the earth? He fulfilled the law perfectly, He called disciples out of their worldly ways to follow Him, and then He taught them how to live righteously. Unlike Yeshua, we can't die for anyone else's sins, but we can sacrifice our own fleshly desires for a life devoted to Yeshua and His Way, and trust in His sacrifice that calls us into a new life of obedience in Him. When we are walking in lock-step according to these Truths, the enemy cannot break us, thus our purpose together is to help each other hold the line.

{New slide—4} And just as Yeshua made disciples, He commanded His followers to do the same. If we are His followers—the disciples of His disciples—then we ought to understand this passage in Matthew 28:18-20 as directly addressed to us. We read: “And Yeshua came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amein.” And Amein indeed! As part of our effort to “Raise the Standard” of Yeshua, it is our duty to become disciple-making disciples of our Messiah. It's not enough for us to simply confess our sins and achieve grace through the atoning sacrifice of Yeshua; we are also called to rise up and follow Yeshua's righteous example by walking alongside others who are learning to do the same. As Yeshua called disciples out of the world to repent and hear the good news, so too must we. This third call of duty aligns with the Apostle Paul in Acts 17:30-31, who taught that we ought to patiently, gently, and kindly call all people everywhere out of “ignorance.” He wrote: “[God] now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” In this passage, Paul was speaking to the men of Athens who had set up idols all over the city. Today, you and I ought to speak to brothers and sisters who are being misled by false teachers as well as men and women who are caught up in modern forms of idolatry. I'm sure you can name many, but examples include mystery religions devoted to promoting racism that unnecessarily pits ethnic groups against one another; the religion of earth worship that calls for sacrifices to be made to curb “global warming” or “climate change;” self worship devoted to elevating our own image above all else on social media, and similarly the worship of pleasure and even sinful practices in direct rebellion against God; “scientism,” which elevates harmful pharmaceutical potions and

unprovable and unlikely theories for how the world and our population came to be; and last but not least, worship of material possessions and power, which completely distract many from the Way that God has shown us. These examples are new forms of ancient paganism, and just as Paul called for the people of Athens to repent, we too have been chosen to call for those caught up in these and other counterfeit religions to repent. As Pastor Mike Sutcliffe pointed out during the “Raise the Standard” conference, we ought to “always be preaching the Gospel, and sometimes use words.”

{New slide—5} Our words and actions ought to shine the light of Yeshua all around us, as Pastor Daniel pointed out, citing Matthew 5:14-16, where we read: “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” The light of Truth is the Word of God, and if—on account of our faith—Yeshua is truly living within us, then we ought to walk like He walked by living as He lived, teaching as He taught, and sacrificing like He sacrificed, for the love of God and one another. Yes, for the love of God and one another, we ought to demonstrate that we know Yeshua with absolutely everything we say and do, and then when anyone asks why we live and carry ourselves like we do, we ought to be ready to boldly proclaim the Truth without holding back. We cannot fear the consequences of living and speaking the Truth lest the devil ensnare us in one of his most devious traps. As John wrote: “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18a). Yes, we are certain to face difficulties and even persecution in this life for living out the Gospel, but when we succumb to fear because of the enemy’s attacks against us, our faith becomes void. In 1st Peter 3:13-16, the Apostle explained this principle in a way that ought to resonate with us well. A disciple of Yeshua himself, Peter wrote us an exhortation on how to become better disciples of Yeshua. We read: “And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed. ‘And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.’ But sanctify the LORD God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Messiah may be ashamed.” As members of Yeshua’s body, we ought to be ready to stand against the wiles of the devil and put on the full armor of God. We do this better when we stand together in Spirit and in Truth.

{New slide—6} The Apostle Peter knew Yeshua in the flesh, and so we are blessed to have his instruction to help us understand the narrow path ahead of us as he learned it directly. To demonstrate how our faith ought to be handed off to others, we might consider how the Apostle Paul came onto the scene later as a disciple of Yeshua trained up by some of these Apostles. Led also by the Spirit of God, he then went out as a disciple maker who explained how to make disciples. To the Corinthians in his second letter, Paul wrote the following in chapter 3, verses 2-4. We read: “You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Messiah, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. And we have such trust through Messiah toward God.” In other words, as we’ve been saying, everything we say and do in this life ought to reflect our intimate relationship with the King. We ought to hold ourselves together as one body in Messiah Yeshua and live out the righteousness of God with one another by encouraging and exhorting one another. The letters of Scripture ought to come alive in us so we can demonstrate the power of God to others, which manifest in the blessings of joy and peace that cannot be legitimately mistaken by those we encounter in the world. And as Peter said, we always ought to be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks us a reason for the hope that is in us. Rather than fear the enemy and the consequences we might face in the world for obeying God, we ought to fear God and keep His commandments, ready to cast out the darkness around us everywhere we go. And as we stand with the LORD, we must avoid despair, discouragement, or fear of the world, we ought not complain or cause strife, hating those who ignore us or scorn us. Rather, we ought to teach others with long-suffering, gentleness, and kindness, humbly recognizing our own shortcomings. Paul later taught us in Philippians 2:12-16, where we read: “my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the Word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Messiah that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.” Indeed, we ought to serve as lights in the world on a lampstand, shining forth Yeshua’s doctrine with the Spirit of love for all who are willing to grasp it.

{New slide—7} As our brother Micah explained last week, we don’t stand against people who are ignorant, spiteful, or rebellious, but against the evil spirits that are holding them captive. The Apostle Paul explained it this way in Ephesians 6:11-12,

where we read: “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” Make no mistake, we are at war against evil and we have to pick a side. The devil and his minions are actually out to get us, and they’re not going to stop until they defeat us or we endure in the LORD’s army until the end—our endurance is guaranteed victory in Messiah Yeshua. In his message to pastors last Friday, Pastor Daniel pointed out three different ways the devil comes after Truth-bearers; namely, he tempts us to sin and takes us out of the LORD’s army when we fall victim to his efforts; he discourages us with lies in an attempt to wear down our defenses, so that we can no longer stand in battle array with our brothers and sisters; and worst of all, he causes us to fear the battle itself and he diverts us away from taking the enemy’s ground by causing us to lay down our swords. To stand in the battle against the spiritual hosts of wickedness and walk in victory with the LORD, we need to endure in our faithfulness according to the Way Yeshua showed us, fully trusting in the promises of God that He has given us in His Word. When we fear God and heed His commands, we can follow Him into battle using the weapons of our warfare that He has provided for us. To fear God is to honor Him as the one who knows the best way forward—to trust His commandments for victory in every battle we face. And while these truths certainly apply to us individually, they also apply to us collectively. Our mission, should we choose to accept it, is to cast off our former wickedness and embrace God’s Truth, and then to go out and demonstrate the Way of Messiah to others. In doing this, we ought to reserve discipleship for those who respond to the Word of Truth—those who are ready to cast off their former lusts and embrace the righteousness of God. Only in surrender to God’s Word can anyone effectively join Yeshua’s army. According to Matthew 12:30, Yeshua said: “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.” To be with Him is to love Him, and to love Him is to keep His commandments. And in our obedience to God’s will, we also ought to pour out ourselves, as Yeshua showed us to do, so that we might free those who respond to the Word of Truth. Pastor Mike Sutcliffe explained: “we can’t walk past deliverance to salvation. We need deliverance first.” We have to be ready to disciple new brothers and sisters who respond to God’s Word. We can’t leave them to an elementary faith that never progresses. Our mission is to gather those embracing God’s Word and add them to our battle array by walking alongside them and lovingly instructing them how to walk according to God’s Word. In Psalm 18, verses 1-3, we get a glimpse of what that looks like: We read: “I will love You, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my

stronghold. I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies.” I pray the LORD gives us each hearts that sing such thanksgiving and praise!

{New slide—8} Taking this one step further, in Ephesians 6:13-18, we read: “Take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield (θυρεὸν—thyreon) of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—” Just as we read in Psalm 18, our defensive weapon against the devil is our shield of faith in God, and the word used for “shield” in Greek—thyreon (θυρεὸν)—helps us to understand a deeper intended meaning. The “thyreon” was a large shield used by Roman legionaries collectively. Soldiers stood together in formation by overlapping these shields, protecting their brothers as well as themselves from the flaming arrows sent their way by the enemy. While Paul didn’t plainly explain this metaphor, his use of plural pronouns within the passage express a united front against the enemy rather than an individual battle. In Philippians 1:27, Paul also wrote, “...stand fast in one Spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel.” The point in exploring a passage like this is to demonstrate how God’s Word calls us to stand together in our faith. We are not meant to do this alone. Many recoil from community because of bad experiences from their perspective, and sometimes their criticism is valid, but often it’s not. Often times the devil comes in with confusion to generate strife and misunderstanding. But God brings clarity. We are specifically looking to link shields with other pastors who provide this clarity so our communities can stand together with them in unity. As followers of Yeshua, we all need wise men to instruct us properly according to God’s Word and remind us of his promises. And in turn, we pastors need other pastors and all of you to keep us from falling victim to the enemy’s flaming darts of discouragement, temptation and fear. Our faith works best when it is locked together as one. That being said, our united faith is not meant to be lived out standing in one place. If we’re to follow Yeshua, we also have to move forward together. We do this by guarding our heads with the Word of God that promises us salvation in Yeshua. When we speak the Truth of God’s Word over one another, especially in prayer, we encourage and embolden one another to walk forward in formation. Likewise, our breastplates of righteousness guard our core bodies from attack, so that the flaming darts that occasionally make it through our shield of faith do

not pierce our hearts. Our hearts are protected from falling when we walk in the righteousness of Messiah. And in our righteousness, guarded by our faithful fellowship of salvation in Yeshua, we can walk forward together and wield our swords—the Word of God that comes forth in the Spirit of Truth guided by prayer. We take ground from the enemy by speaking the Truth over the enemy's lies and by courageously standing firm with confidence in our position, which comes from Scripture alone. And while we should not shy away from wielding the sword of Truth, we ought to do so strategically. Paul wrote that our shoes ought to carry us forward with the Gospel of peace. Our battle is not against flesh and blood—it's not against other people—our battle is against the spiritual hosts of wickedness. We have to be gentle, patient and kind with one another as we wield the Word of God so that it lands in the right place and cuts out whatever is keeping our brothers and sisters in bondage. In order to make disciples for Messiah Yeshua, we first have to deliver people from the enemy's camp. We can't reach them with force, but only with love, and love does not force its own way.

{New slide—9} We ought to take a few minutes to explore the meaning of love, because love is the key to unlocking all of Scripture as well as what we've been discussing today. Most of you probably know Yeshua's answer to a lawyer's question found in Matthew 22:33; namely: "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Continuing into verses 37-40, "Yeshua said to him, 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." These commandments were first written in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:17-18. They come from the law of God—the Torah, and their meaning is consistent throughout Scripture. Rather than fall into the trap of many false teachers, who explain that the law was superseded by these two commandments, it's important to state plainly that these two commandments actually summarize the law and uphold it. When we love God first, we keep His commandments, and when we love our neighbor second, we trust in God's commandments by doing so. Don't take my word for it. Writing to the early community of believers, which John affectionally called a "lady"—the "bride of Christ"—, we read the following from 2nd John, starting in verse 4: "I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received a commandment from the Father." Let's pause there a moment. Just to be clear, Scripture interprets Scripture in Psalm 119:142, where we read: "Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your law is truth." And in Psalm 119:151, where we read: "You are near, O LORD, and all Your commandments are truth." These early believers were walking in the Truth of God's commandments. John doesn't disappoint

as we read on in into verses 5-6, because Scripture is consistent throughout. He continued: “And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.” To love God and to love one another is to keep the commandments of God; this is the Truth that John rejoiced to see the early church living out, and this we also ought to do. Our fellowship with the affiliated churches is going to help us stand in this truth, as should our fellowship with one another here in this congregation. We are stronger together standing against the attacks of the enemy, and the enemy most certainly is coming against these truths.

{New slide—10} In the same way the sword of the Spirit can be yielded violently against our neighbors, leading to error, so too can the idea that love is blind obedience, and this we also ought to guard against. Paul helped to clarify the narrow path for us in 1st Corinthians 13, which we’ll examine next. Let’s start in verse 1, where we read: “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.” And so, it doesn’t matter how flowery our language might be or even if we speak spiritually in multiple languages to reach believers we wouldn’t normally be able to reach. The greatest and second greatest commandment is not fulfilled like this. In verse 2, we read: “And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” And so it is not even love to rightly divide the Word, to understand its interpretation, to understand all the workings of the world, how it was created, or how it functions, or even a faith that calms the sea or allows us to walk on water, if we are not walking in love, none of that matters. So far, Paul’s teaching in 1st Corinthians 13 align with Matthew 7:21-23, where Yeshua Himself said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘LORD, LORD,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, ... Many will say to Me in that day, ‘LORD, LORD, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? ... And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me.’” It doesn’t matter what prophecies, what interpretations, what teachings, or what miracles we carry out as part of our faith. If we lack love, none of this matters. If we lack love, Yeshua Himself will command us to depart from Him on the Last Day. Paul continued in verse 3, explaining, “And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.” I want you to take this in. Even martyrs who die in the name of Yeshua—those who give their lives for His name—if they don’t have love, they won’t inherit the Kingdom of God. Those who give their lives to charitable causes? It means nothing without love. So what

exactly does it take? What does it mean to love God and love one another? We have to read Matthew 7, verses 21-23 very carefully to find the answer. Yeshua explained: “he who does the will of My Father in heaven” will “enter” the Kingdom of God, but “you who practice lawlessness” will not enter.

{New slide—11} By putting these two passages together, it’s clear that we need to be doers of the law, and not hearers only, as James 1:22 explains, otherwise we deceive ourselves. It is not obedience to do miracles or wonders, to teach prophecies or interpret Scripture, and not even to give alms to the poor—this just means our names are written in the book of life. But as “the LORD said to Moses,” in Exodus 32:33, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.” But Yeshua comforted us in Revelation 3:5, saying: “He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.” Overcome what? The rest of the context in Revelation 3 explains: “I have not found your works perfect before God,” Yeshua explained, but the remedy is this: “hold fast and repent.” And so, it’s clear: those who practice lawlessness will not inherit the Kingdom, because they lack the love of God, but those who do the will of the Father in Heaven will inherit the Kingdom of God, because to love God is to keep His commandments. As I’ve explained, those of us in the church are going to be under pressure from the enemy to violate these commandments; this is his number one goal because this separates us from God. We’re going to be attacked. We’re going to be discouraged. We’re going to be tempted. We may even be filled with worldly fear. The solution is willful obedience, with all of our hearts, to the Word of God, through prayerful surrender. Our works have to be perfect before God. As James 2:24 explains, “a man is justified by works, and not by faith only,” because as he concludes in verse 26, “faith without works is dead.”

{New slide—12} This gives a better context for the rest of 1st Corinthians 13, which becomes like the rest of the Apostolic writings; namely, an exhortation to endure in faithful and willing obedience to God through every trial and tribulation. We’ll see that our obedience has to be a matter of the heart, born in love. We read: “Love suffers long and is kind.” In discipling others, we teach the law with patience and kindness, moving at the right pace with discernment according to the leading of the Holy Spirit. “Love does not envy.” We don’t desire what God has not given us, but we offer thanksgiving and praise for the gifts He has given us to do His will. “Love does not parade itself,” it “is not puffed up.” We don’t obey God’s commandments to earn our salvation, because our salvation is through grace alone. How then could we possibly brag about keeping God’s commandments. Paul even explained in Ephesians 2 that

we ought not boast about our works—these are simply the things that we ought to do with humility. Love “does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked.” We ought to think of others more highly than ourselves as we seek to serve the LORD. We ought not return evil for evil, but rather “do good to those who curse [us] and pray for those who spitefully use [us]” (Luke 6:27-28).

{New slide—13} Continuing, we ought not demand our own way, but seek God’s way always. Love “thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the Truth.” And here is the main point of the whole passage. If it is love to keep God’s commandments, and the LORD never knew the lawless ones—He does not remember their names—then we ought to rejoice in His law, hate sin, and practice righteousness in a way that prevents sin from even entering our thoughts. Remember what Paul taught in 2nd Corinthians 10:5: We ought to bring “every thought into captivity to the obedience of Messiah.” This is important! Yeshua explained in Matthew 5; to look at a woman with lust is to commit adultery; to be angry with our brother is to commit murder. These are thoughts inside our head, which originate in our hearts. They aren’t even outward actions. Does the LORD judge our love in this way? We read in 2nd Chronicles 16:9a, “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.” The LORD is interested in our heart condition, not just our actions. Yes, the LORD judges our heart condition. If our hearts are not full of love for God and love for one another, today is the day we need to repent. Do not delay. Eternal life is at stake!

{New slide—14} Things get even more serious as the passage in 1st Corinthians 13 concludes: We read: Love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.” Again, this is an often-repeated Truth in the Apostolic writings. In John 16:33, Yeshua explained: “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” In Matthew 24, He defined this tribulation. He said there would be false Messiahs, deceivers, wars, rumors of wars, ethnic struggles, rising and falling of empires, famines, disease, and natural disasters. He added that His followers would be turned over to be persecuted and even killed, and that we would be hated for standing fast in our faith. He said even among believers, folks would offend one another and take offense, betray one another, and even hate one another, and lawlessness would flourish so that many would turn away from the faith. He concluded: “He who endures to the end shall be saved.” This sure sounds a lot like bearing every insult and inconvenience, believing in all of Yeshua’s accomplishments, hoping for all of God’s promises, and enduring through all trials and tribulations until

the LORD comes to deliver us, doesn't it? In 1st Peter 4, verses 12-13, we read: "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Messiah's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy." That glory, the salvation that comes at the end, is the "love that never fails." God's love is directed toward those of us who trust in Yeshua through every trial and tribulation we face in this life, and in this He will bring us into His eternal Kingdom. Our love toward Him, trusting Him in the testing He brings, knowing it is meant for our good, trusting that the end of it is eternal life, this is also a love that does not fail. As we read in Hebrews 12:11, a verse at the end of one of my favorite passages in Scripture, "no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." Is not righteousness the very fruit that springs up into eternal life? It is. Yeshua said, "those who do the will of my Father" will inherit the Kingdom of God.

{New slide—15} The Apostolic writings are consistent with what we read in Torah. Consider this identical statement in Deuteronomy 8, verses 1-5, where we read: "Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers. And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD. Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the LORD your God chastens you." We are living in the wilderness right now during a time of transition between life and death, death and life. Brothers and sisters, the LORD is using this time we're living in the world to chasten us and humble us to test us, to see if we will keep His commandments or not. If we learn to live on every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God, we will wear the garments of righteousness and enter into God's kingdom as adopted sons and daughters. This is the love of God we are called to embrace. This is the love that never fails. His promise is certain when we love Yeshua and keep the commandments of God, for our endurance in such faith is what ensures our eternal salvation.

{New slide—16} Pastor Daniel's sermon on Saturday was about the narrow path into God's Kingdom, and it went into way more detail that I'm able to share with you today. I hope to post links to the three core messages from "Raise the Standard" as soon as they are available, and I hope you take the time to watch them. Today's overview only scratches the surface of what it truly takes to follow Yeshua. Moving on, I want to show you three passages that I hope will inspire you to grow together with our fellowship in Messiah Yeshua, because I believe that without fellowship with other believers who are truly seeking the LORD it will be next to impossible to endure until the end in this life. Among God's simple commandments by which we show our love for Him is the fourth commandment to remember the Sabbath Day, which is aligned with His commands in Leviticus 23 that we keep His Holy Days sacred. But how many people who say they love Him actually obey this? Many consider these commandments a small matter, but I can't help but wonder how God feels about those who are cavalier about His Word? The King of the Universe has invited us to come in near to Him every Sabbath Day and on seven other appointed times in the year. What does it say about our eternal relationship with Yeshua if we can't even answer His invitation to join Him periodically like this? God have mercy on us. And forgive us all, LORD, for we do not know what we're doing. What else are we missing? God have mercy on me, a sinner. In Matthew 7:13-14, Yeshua commanded us, saying: "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." How narrow is the gate to life? Noah and his family were eight people saved among perhaps even hundreds of millions who were destroyed by the flood that covered the Earth. Joshua and Caleb were two of more than 600,000 who left Egypt and made it into the Promised Land. We have to be righteous, like Noah, Joshua and Caleb by following the Way of Yeshua, which is described in His Word. We have to be able to exclaim like David, "Oh how I love your law!" We have to be able to earnestly yearn for Yeshua like Paul, when he wrote in 1st Corinthians 9:24, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it." According to Luke 13:24, Yeshua said: "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able." What prohibits us from entering the narrow gate? It's lawlessness, plain and simple—a failure to turn toward Yeshua, the one who redeems us from all sin. We are saved by grace, but not so we can turn the LORD's grace into lewdness. Yeshua is not a minister of sin. After Yeshua explained that it's easier for a camel to walk through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to be saved, his disciples asked the question that we are probably all wondering right about now. We read in Matthew 19:25-26: the disciples "were greatly astonished, saying, 'Who then can be saved?' But Yeshua

looked at them and said to them, ‘With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’” When we humble ourselves and pray and seek the face of God, who is Yeshua, He will forgive our sins and heal our land. The grace of God surpasses understanding, and thank God none of us are going to sit on the throne to judge one another. In light of the full counsel of God and what we’ve been studying today, what do you suppose our focus ought to be in this life?

{New slide—17} The Legacy Standard Bible version of Revelation 14:12 explains most succinctly: “Here is the perseverance of the saints: who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Yeshua.” It is up to us to endure in our faith, no matter what trial or tribulation we face in this life. We accomplish this only by daily reading the Word of God and devoting our lives to prayer. As your pastor who is part of a group of pastors who believe, teach and practice these Truths, it is my job to study the Word daily and pray for each and every one of you. Hold me accountable to this. In Acts 6, the 12 apostles delegated authority to deacons who would help them with the work of the congregation, so they could continue to study the Word and pray. In verse 4, they explain: “We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.” This is my duty to you. In 1st Thessalonians 5:17, the Apostle Paul wrote, “pray without ceasing.” He meant this literally. Every evil thought, every sinful glance, we ought to take captive to the will of God in Messiah Yeshua. In Psalm 1, David explained: “Blessed is the man Who[se] ... delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.” This is what it means to have faith in Yeshua, the Word of God who became flesh. We ought to meditate on His Word day and night, pray using His Word with total faith and no doubting, and live according to the Way the LORD has shown us. What’s at stake? Yeshua explained in the garden of Gethsemane, according to Matthew 26:41. We read: “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Our prayers are what keep us from falling into temptation. The LORD inhabits the praise of His people. When we hallow the name of Yeshua and ask for His will to be done in us as it is done in Heaven, the enemy cannot reach us. We can be certain, because God told us: the dragon is going to try. As we read in Revelation 12:17, That dragon, whose known as the devil, the serpent of old, and Satan, is “enraged with the woman” Israel, “and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Messiah Yeshua.” We are at war! And this is a war we cannot win alone, even if we profess the name of Yeshua, for we are not strong enough to withstand the enemy’s attacks when we disobey God’s commandment to congregate with other believers. In doing this, we are turning our backs on Yeshua. Don’t be deceived and think otherwise.

{New slide—18} As the writer of Hebrews exhorted in Hebrews 10:23-25, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” The Day referenced here is Judgment Day, and we will not be able to stand in the Judgment if we willfully disobey what God has commanded us to do. We come in together on the Sabbath and God’s other appointed times to stir each other to love and good works, and we have already discussed today just how important this is. We are justified by our love toward God and one another. This is the greatest and second greatest commandments of them all. We come together to exhort one another to follow Yeshua, and to pray for one another so that the devil cannot have his way with us. Paul did not parse words when he wrote in 1st Timothy 2:8, “I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.” What’s the “therefore” refer back to here? God appointed Paul to be a preacher, apostle and teacher of the Gentiles who spoke the truth about Messiah without deceit. In this role, Paul expressed his earnest desire that all would learn to pray everywhere with hands raised to combat the attacks of the enemy. We endure in our faith when we devote ourselves to the Word of God and prayer, which then helps us to apply the Word to our lives in every situation and preserve our soul from death. I want to return to the theme that we started with today to close. With the fellowship that is now blossoming following "Raise the Standard" in Texas, we have come together with a group of pastors and churches throughout the country who stand in these truths that I’m teaching you today. We are stronger together, because we can and ought to hold one another up in prayer and help one another endure in this life. The path to eternal life is too narrow to forsake the assembling of ourselves together like this, and I earnestly desire the mercy of God to fall upon us all because of our faith in this calling. I want you to know that all of our affiliate pastors, including me, are praying for the congregations throughout our fellowship, and we are praying for more to come in to the knowledge of the love of God with us, also. We are praying for you—I am praying for you—without ceasing, and I am regularly studying the Word each and every day so I can bring you the exhortation that God wants His sons and daughters to know. We are blessed to be a part of this, and I pray that the blessings will continue to increase all the way into eternity. I want to leave you with a passage from 1st Samuel 12, verses 23-25, where the shepherd himself explained his role as leader over a congregation in Israel. And as he exhorted Israel with these words, I also exhort you today. We read: “Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way. Only fear the LORD, and serve Him in truth with all your

heart; for consider what great things He has done for you. But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away....” May the LORD our God and Savior Yeshua the Messiah help me to continue supporting you through prayer and instruction according to the Word of God, and may our prayers for the LORD's help be answered so our battle array is strengthened and we can move out together into the world to take new ground and harvest new souls for the Kingdom of God, all for God's glory! Blessings and shalom to you on this most holy shabbat!