

Preparing for Revival

by John Franklin

Preparing for revival requires humility, repentance, and faithfulness, and involves a spiritual awakening among God's people.

Duration: 52:24

Scripture: Malachi 4:6, Luke 1:78-79, Luke 3:7, Luke 3:15, Luke 7:27

Topics: "Repentance", "Revival"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the role of John the Baptist in preparing the people for the coming of the Lord. John preached a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, urging people to prepare the way for the Lord. The preacher emphasizes the need for believers to examine their belief systems and make necessary changes in order to be prepared for revival. He also highlights the importance of bearing good fruit and the consequences of not doing so. The sermon concludes with the message that God stirs his people to get them ready for revival and that believers must ask themselves what they need to do to align with God's agenda.

Transcript

Good morning. It's already been a good morning, hadn't it? Amen. Something that came to mind is often we seek the presence of God, the P-R-E-S-E-N-T-S, when we need to seek the presence of God, P-R-S-E-N-C-E.

I felt like we've experienced the presence of God this morning. Amen. What a joy it's been here.

Have you all had a good time? It's been neat just to see people in hotels and the fellowship. And a lot of people, somebody commented to me this morning. They said, we all needed this.

We all need this. Isn't that true? Don't we all need this? You know, there's times in our life when we all need a boost or an encouragement. We all need a time of revival.

We need these kind of spiritual retreats in our life. But you know, it should be that it's not just at a conference that this happens. But we should be able to have this experience in our car while we're driving.

We should be able to have this experience in our quiet times. In our family devotion times. I hope and pray that for all of us.

We'll have these moments of revival. We'll have these God moments. I had a God moment on an airplane.

I've had a couple of God moments on airplanes and opportunities to witness to people. But this happened in August of 2001. I prayed to share the gospel with somebody who ever sat next to me.

And by God's grace, this Arab fellow sat next to me. And we connected. And I was able to talk with him.

I asked him if he'd like to hear my story, if I was converted to Christ. And he said, sure. And I won't tell you that story because God was doing something I want you to hear about outside of that.

There was a young lady sitting in front of him that listened to the whole presentation. And God sent this Korean lady to sit beside me. And after I'd finished witnessing to him and sharing with him, it was a very warm experience.

This lady, you could just feel her about to jump over the seat. You could just you could tell she was already turned towards me. And they were telling us to straighten up our tables and put our seats up and all that.

And when I turned to her, she was smiling. And in broken English, she goes, she's my background. I've been involved with Campus Crusade for Christ.

The first thing she said to me, she was Campus Crusade for Christ. And I said, yes, ma'am. I was trained that way in college because me too, me too.

It's all Korea. She says, why you taught me pray? Why you taught me pray? Whole time you taught me pray for you. Isn't that awesome? Folks, you never know what God is up to when you just step out in faith to do what he's asked you to do.

He's got other things going on around you that he's already orchestrated. So step out in faith and experience the presence of God in an incredible way. I encourage you to do that this morning in your daily life.

We have the privilege and honor today to have John Franklin. Dr. John Franklin is going to come in and share with us in just a moment. John is the prayer strategist in the pastoral ministries department at Lifeway.

John's become a dear friend. He's one of the outstanding young spiritual leaders in our nation. John's written a book on spiritual warfare.

There's some other things he's working on and some of his works are in the, in Lifeway. John's with Lifeway. Many of y'all remember T.W. Hunt used to be the prayer person for the Sunday school board and then Lifeway.

And then John is the person who took T.W. Hunt's place. John is married to Kathy. They have three children, live in Nashville.

Formerly, John was the minister of prayer at Woodstock Baptist Church, First Baptist Woodstock, Woodstock, Georgia. And it's an honor to have him here. Last year at our prayer conference, John was one of our speakers and he spoke on the key to Second Chronicles 714.

Now, we heard a lot of great messages, but this is the one that penetrated my heart. John talked about the concept of what if God turns his back on us? And John literally turned around and preached with his back to us. That was a breaking time.

That was a humbling time. And he talked about the four principles of Second Chronicles 7:14, that we must humble ourselves. We must seek his face.

We must pray and we must turn from our wicked ways. And then he'll heal our land. We'll hear from heaven and he'll heal our land.

But the thing he preached on was the key to Second Chronicles 7:14. And the key was the very first thing. We often look at all four principles, but I think we need to focus on the first one.

We must humble ourselves. And folks, that's hard for us to do as Americans. But, John, I appreciate you pointing that out last year.

That was a powerful moment. Please come. You're welcome, John Franklin, as he comes to share.

Well, our theme is preparing for revival. And I want to begin by just addressing that a little bit, because I don't know about you, but there seems to be a default in my own life that when I hear that, I immediately focus on what should my actions and behaviors be? But I think maybe a way we could phrase that is if we are praying and preparing for revival, we should really ask, Lord, how do you prepare your people for revival? And so I want us to go and to look at a particular passage of scripture and in Luke chapter three, where we're going to see the process that the Lord Jesus began for preparing the people in that day for revival. Now, he had not been lax or lazy about this.

In fact, if we were to go back to Luke one seventeen, we could see the prophecy about John the Baptist when it says he will also go before him. That's Jesus in the spirit and power of Elijah. Now, when it says he's going to go in the spirit of Elijah, what does that mean? Does that mean, as some people say, that reincarnation is a reality because this is obviously Elijah come back.

Well, obviously we don't believe that. So what does that mean in the spirit of Elijah meant the very same spirit and the way that spirit was manifesting himself through Elijah was the exact same way he was going to manifest himself through John the Baptist. Then the Holy Spirit was going to be working through John the Baptist so closely that it would not look very much different.

So he was going to come back in the spirit and power of Elijah. Now, to do what? What's this? To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children. And the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that is, those who were not walking with the Lord to understand what righteousness was.

Now, look at this last phrase to make ready a people what? Prepared for the Lord. And so this was the prophecy about him in this scripture. If we were to go a little bit later in the chapter to verse 76, his father is making a prophecy about him.

And he says, and you, child, will be called the prophet of the highest, for you will go before the face of the Lord to what? Prepare his ways. And later on in Luke 7, 27, Jesus said that he was the one whom it was spoken of that would come and prepare his ways. And so we're going to see kind of around these brackets right here versus a major extensive text right here in chapter three.

And here's what it says right here in chapter three. And we're going to read in verse one. Now, I just want to kind of give you a warning as we read this.

Yeah, these are one of these places in the Bible. That's a little bit hard to get a hold of. You know, if you're a Sunday school teacher and if you don't like somebody in the class, this is a good one to call on them to read.

And you'll understand why here. Now, the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip, tetrarch of Iteria in the region of Trichonitis and Lysannaesus, the tetrarch of Abilene, while Annas and Caiaphas were high priest. The word of God came to John, son of Zacharias.

Now, I want to ask you a question. Does the Bible ever record any unnecessary details? Then what in the world are all these strange people with these strange names doing right here in this passage? Why would God have gone to the trouble to record him? Well, well, let me ask you something. Let's see what we know about these people right here.

What do you know about Tiberius Caesar? What about all the Caesars? Did they like Christians or not? Well, I think they liked them. They made their lions' coats very healthy. You know, really, they didn't like them.

Pontius Pilate, what do we know about him? What kind of ruler was he? What did he do? Not my responsibility, right? And sentenced Jesus to be crucified. What about Herod? What do you know about Herod? You know, Herod has to be one of the most wicked people in the whole Bible. You know, this is talking about the grandson of Herod the Great.

Herod the Great was the one that tried to kill Jesus. This is the one that beheaded John. But his family was super dysfunctional.

In fact, it was said it was safer to be Herod's pig than to be a son, because he had put to death some of his own children. And so, in fact, a little bit later on, the Herod of Grippa, he actually married his sister. And they had an incestuous affair together.

And so, he's the guy right here, this Tetrarch, and he's got his brother Philip right here from Iteria, and a guy named Lysannaesus we don't know too much about. And then there's Annas and Caiaphas, who were high priests. Now, what's wrong with that? They're high priests.

What's wrong with that? There was only supposed to be one high priest, and here there are two. And what had happened was that Annas had been the original high priest, and he had fallen in disfavor with the Romans, and they had pushed him out. But he put his son-in-law in there, and he still stayed back and manipulated the puppet strings of the kingdom.

In fact, when Jesus is arrested, guess whose house he goes to first? It's to Annas, then Caiaphas. Then he's brought before Pilate. Now, let me tell you what the Bible is saying right here.

It's saying in the year that Adolf Hitler was running the world, and Joseph Stalin was over the country, and Saddam Hussein was in charge of the secret police. Right in the middle of that context, the word of God came to John, son of Zacharias, and the wilderness. Now, how long had it been since God had spoken to the people of Israel? Over 400 years.

Do you see what the Bible is painting right here in this particular context? The people of God had been without the presence of God for an eternity. In fact, if you were to subtract 400 years off American history, what do you have? Indians. We didn't even exist.

Could you imagine living without the voice of God for that long? And here they are right here in a horrible situation and a context. Without hearing the voice of God, and all of a sudden the word of God came to John, son of Zacharias, and the wilderness. You know what God's doing? He is preparing the stage through circumstances to get his people's attention right here.

I want to ask you, do you think that God might be preparing the circumstances in the life of our nation right now? What would it look like for God to be trying to get our attention? Have you looked to make the connection on what he is doing to try to get us to focus on him? We're going to talk a little bit what that would look like that he's doing right now in this nation. But here he is right here trying to get his people's attention. And John, the word of God comes to John, and he went into all the region around the Jordan preaching a baptism of repentance.

For the remissions of sins as it is written. In other words, here's what it's going to look like to preach the baptism of repentance. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, what? Prepare the ways of the Lord.

We are praying, we are preparing for revival. Make his path straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low.

The crooked places shall be made straight and the rough way smooth and all flesh shall see the salvation of God. And so here's the synopsis summary that John came to prepare people for the coming of the Lord. You know what we're looking at right here? When you read the New Testament, one of the things that you ought to see out of all the others is it's an invitation to the people of God to have revival.

That's what it was. And John is going to get them ready to do this very thing. And so look what he does in verse 7. By the way, how many of you are pastors in here? Now, you want to be biblical in your sermon? Now, next time you preach a sermon on Sunday morning, you know, you just might want to follow the pattern of John right here when somebody walks the aisle.

Okay, so he's in First Baptist Church, Jerusalem. And then he said to the multitude that came out to be baptized by him, brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Could you imagine that? They're walking the aisle right down here in church and he's greeting them. He's going up two or three rows to grab their hand and shake him.

He said, hello, snakes. Who told you to walk this aisle? Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Now, folks, why in the world would John the Baptist say something as radically offensive to a group that is seeking God is something like that. Watch.

Look what he says right here. Therefore, bear fruits worthy of repentance and do not begin to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father. For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

What's he doing right here? Do you understand what John is doing right here? When they come forward and they want the benefits of God and the presence of God, John is not looking at what they're saying. He is reading the heart of the people of God. And one thing he understood about the people of God is whenever they have been a long time without his presence, typically they will take something that is

completely and totally spiritually true and use it as an excuse to remain in sin.

In Jeremiah's day, God was pleading through Jeremiah for the nation to return to him. And you find in chapter seven that that he says, will you stand before my presence and lie, commit adultery, steal, murder and say that you're safe, safe to do all these things? You cannot say the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord. Let me let me tell you what happened way back in about 715 B.C. Under Hezekiah, the Assyrian army invaded the land and they were going to try to destroy Jerusalem where the house of God was that bore his name.

And God rose up and destroyed 185,000 Assyrians in one night. And they came to this correct theological assumption. God will not let his own name be defamed and God will protect the house that bears his name.

Now, I want to ask you, is that totally 100 percent accurate? Yes. Is it accurate to say then, because he will, I can live any way that I want to and stand before it and be delivered to do all kinds of evil that I want? No. What were they thinking right here in in in in John the Baptist day in Jesus day? We have Abraham as our father.

You know what they're saying? They're saying we've got a special relationship with God. Was that absolutely true? Yes. Did that special relationship then excuse them to remain in sin and be unaccountable to God? No.

You say when the people of God's hearts begin to depart from God, they latch on to something about him. That's 100 percent true. But it becomes the cause of them staying in sin.

And here's the first thing that God does in preparing his people for revival. He begins to impact their mentality and the lies that they're now clinging on to that are 100 percent true. But they're the cause of them not repenting.

Now, what would that look like in our day? Well, I just want to throw a few out there. I don't think this is an exhaustive list, but let me tell you one of them that I'm absolutely convinced of. And that is we have been talking about the love of God in such a way that we are leaving the people an impression that he will no longer hold us accountable for sin.

We are saying everything we're saying about the love of God is true. There's no God as near as our God. He loves us completely.

He's redeemed us. He's done all these favors. But we're talking about it in such a way that our people think God is lenient towards sin.

And because he dealt with the penalty of sin on the cross, then there's no longer any cause for worry when we sin. And you know how we know that? We know it through absolute statistical facts. George Bonner released a survey on November the third, about five months ago.

In it, he asked 10 questions regarding morality. Two of the questions. The first one was, is it permissible for people to live together with someone of the opposite sex before marriage? And he asked this of people in four categories.

First off, were atheists. Second, were other religions. Third, were people who claim to be born again Christians.

And fourth, were a very strict evangelical conservative type of definition. Now, for born again Christians, here was the definition he used. It's someone who has professed Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior in a commitment that is still relevant in their life today.

They believe he has forgiven them of their sin and will take them to heaven when they die. Out of born again Christians, guess what percentage said it is OK to live together with someone of the opposite sex before marriage? 49% of born again Christians said that was OK to do. He asked a little bit later, is it OK to have a sexual relationship with someone of the opposite sex who is not your spouse? And 35% said that was OK to do.

There is something going on about the quality of our discipleship and our day that are leaving our converts by the wholesale millions with the perception that they can come into the presence of a holy God, confess certain things on four spiritual laws, pray a prayer, and then they're safe to do whatever they want to. And folks, the people of God are living that way. God has to radically impact our mentality.

In fact, here's one. Here's another thing I think that we are doing among us who are talking about the issues of revival. I don't think we have a real strong sense of exactly what it means.

And I think this is one of the things that is holding it back from us. Revival never comes to lost people. Revival never comes to lost people.

You know why? You can't revive what hasn't been revived. Revival can only come to someone who is already a believer of God. And when God is going to send revival, it will only come to his people.

And that's where he places the first emphasis. He doesn't place it on the lost. In fact, let me prove it.

Jesus, what did he say? He said what? I was not sent to who? But I was sent to. What did he say? I was not sent to the Gentiles, but I was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Later on in Matthew 10, when he's giving his disciples explicit instructions, he said, Do not go in the way of the Gentiles or the Samaritans, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

It says in John 1, he came to his own, and his own received him not. God always begins with his people. Now, what am I trying to say? Evangelism is unimportant? No, evangelism is very important.

But if the people of God don't return to him, then the lost world will never be impacted. And I am very, very fearful today that as we see the nation going into a moral tailspin, and we recognize we're in serious trouble, that we're saying, My goodness, we've got to get this nation converted, and we're running around, and we're throwing these two terms together. Revival and spiritual awakening and reaching the lost.

And we're lumping it all together. Folks, that is biblically not the way it is. God always comes to those with whom he first has a relationship.

Always. And he extends to them the opportunity to do that. Now, guess what happens when the people of God get right with him? People are converted.

But we've got, we keep, this is a reality for us. I'm not going to try to talk, you know, in generic terms. The reality in American Christianity today, if you're a pastor, and I am one, I'm a bi-vocational pastor as well as

working at Lifeway.

The reality is this. Everything says you've got to be successful and grow your church. You've got to get more people converted.

And if you want to know the number one thing that pleases God is to go get lost people saved. That's all the message that's being driven today. And God, when he came to Simon Peter, he said three times, Peter, do you love me? You know how he said he wanted it expressed? Feed my sheep.

And when the sheep get right with God, then God does everything through them he wants to. We have to have our mentality radically impacted. Now look at the second thing right here that happened right here.

Verse 9. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So the people ask him saying, what shall we do? Now, isn't that interesting? When they walk the aisle, so to speak, at first they wanted God.

When John turned around and overlooked what they were saying with their mouth, then suddenly it seized their heart. And then they began to ask a different question. What shall we do? One of the things that God is going to do in addressing and preparing his people is he has to change our actions and our attitudes.

And the list is too long for us to talk about right here in a message like this. But let me just give you a few of them. Here's one of them, I believe, that is absolutely killing us in church.

And that is unreconciled conflict in relationships. You know, when the Bible says we've been given the ministry of reconciliation, Paul wrote that to a church. Now, he's saying that we're to come and be reconciled to God first and then one another.

And then and only then are we in a position to go out to lost people who have a broken relationship with God and try to reconcile them. But if we haven't reconciled the conflict in our own relationships, then there's no way God is going to honor our hypocrisy by telling lost people, by drawing lost people to come to Jesus. We have churches in splits.

We're doing things. We have divorces rampant in the church. Folks, if two people are Christians, now this is a minimum basic.

We're not talking about if one's lost and one's saved. But if two people are Christians and they come to the place where they say we no longer can live together, what they're really saying is there is no help in Jesus Christ. I have received him as my Lord and Savior.

He understands how to reconcile me to him. But he can't help me at all learn how to get along with my brother or my sister, my wife or my husband. God wants to radically change the conflict that we have in our relationships.

He's going to want to change our prayer life. And Henry said it so eloquently last night. Prayer is a byproduct of a love relationship with Jesus.

It's not a spiritual duty to perform in order to be acceptable before God. But our churches right now, if we look across, we are very anemic in our prayer life. And then we really don't have much idea of how to do it because we haven't been doing it in over 50 years.

You know, I've been asking a question. I've asked this question to about 4,000 leaders across the nation. And it's in groups much smaller than this where I can get feedback.

But I've asked, when was the last time you remember the manifest presence and power of God on a regular basis in your midweek prayer meeting? You know, rarely will anybody answer that. Sometimes people will. When they do, it generally falls into one or two categories.

It's either recently or it's something like the 50s. If the last time God were present significantly on a regular basis in our church prayer meeting was the 50s, you would have to be in your 60s to remember it. And the majority of Americans living today were not alive when JFK was shot.

That means most of us have never encountered the presence of God in our church prayer meetings. And so we don't know how to function that way in the presence of God. We have a ton of learning to do.

Now, what the only assignment I know I have from the Lord right now is helping churches learn how to pray together. And I'm trying to work it on a book right now. And that would take too long to tell you all that process.

But there are some practical things we can do to go back and help the heart of the people of God and then know how to guide them in the presence of God. But we're going to have to deal with our prayerlessness. We're going to have to deal with our materialism.

We're going to have to open our heart up to let go of our stuff. Well, he dealt with their mentality the way that they thought. He deals with their actions.

And then look at this right here. By the way, we'll read a little bit more of this. Verse 11, he answered and said to them, he who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none.

And he who has food, let him do likewise. Then the tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, teacher, what shall we do? And he said to them, collect no more than what is appointed for you. Likewise, the soldiers asked him saying, and what shall we do? So he said to them, do not intimidate anyone or accuse them falsely and be content with your wages.

So he's giving them what we talked about. Certain actions to do that impacts their relationship with their brother. It's just like Isaiah 58.

When he asked the question, is the Lord's arm too short? And he says, no, but your iniquities have separated you from your God. Is this the fast that I've chosen? To bow down to do certain activities? Is this not the fast? And then he begins to list. It's to share your bread with the poor.

It's to give. And he talks about our relationship with our brother. And John is encouraging the same thing.

And then here we come right here. Now, let me put this in context. If God hasn't spoken in 400 years, if you're living in a miserable, horrible situation, and all of a sudden someone rises with a word from God, what's the question you begin asking next? If you've heard there's a Messiah coming, and all of a sudden this happens, what do you ask? Hey, is this Him? Is this the Messiah? Look right here.

That's exactly what they did in verse 15. Do you see it? Now, as the people were in expectation, they had a sense that something was about to happen. And all reason in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not, he said, nope, it's not me.

But folks, let me tell you something. Get ready, because it is about to come. In your day, it's about to happen.

And he begins to talk about Jesus who will come. There's a guy coming after me who's sandal-strapped. I'm not worthy to unlace.

He was before me. And he must increase, and I must decrease. And get ready.

He's coming, folks. Do you know whenever God wants to send revival, He first begins to stir His people to get them ready to get on His agenda. Have you seen anything like that happening in this nation? Let me just tell you something right here.

In 1990, there were 50 or 60 prayer ministries that transcended the local church. In the year 2000, there were over 800. I've been watching the LifeWay Christians bestseller list, and I've tracked that for a while.

And books on prayer are generally in the top ten. In fact, at one time, in paperback, four out of five were in the top ten. Do you know what that indicates when the people of God start suddenly feel a stirring to begin to pray? That is God getting us ready.

And there is an incredible sense of expectation among many pockets and quarters right now of this nation that God's about to come and to do something. And folks, I believe with all my heart that is 100% accurate. I believe with every fiber of my being, we are having an invitation from God to come and experience revival in our day.

We are this close, but there's still something that is lacking in our mentality. Now, I just want to share this right here with you. Revival, the preparation for revival, always occurs in the context of judgment and mercy.

It always occurs whenever the people of God are already under the judgment of God. And He's extending to them an invitation to experience His mercy and to be restored to Him. Let me read this to you right here out of Luke chapter 1, verses 76, 78, and 79.

Well, let's read a whole block because I want you to catch this in context. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the highest, for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender, what? Mercy of our God, with which the dayspring from on high has visited us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet in the way of peace. He says the mercy of God is coming to those who are sitting in the shadow of death.

What's He talking about? Well, let's go back and look at, you remember Luke 1, 17, where it was a prophecy about John the Baptist, and it says He will go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah too, and then He's going to quote directly from Malachi chapter 4, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children. He doesn't include the rest of that quote out of Malachi, but here's what it says in Malachi. Lest I come and strike this land with a curse.

In fact, John the Baptist is telling you about the judgment and the mercy simultaneously existing. He said, we just read it in verse 9, he said, even now the ax is laid at the root of the tree. Do you see what he's saying right here? The people of God have departed from God, God never lets that go without accountability, and He says, in your day, God the Father has at your root an ax, and He's just about to pick

it up and swing, but I want you to know that He's extending you a little bit more chance for mercy.

In fact, Jesus, when He began His inaugural sermon in Luke chapter 4, He said, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me to do what? Oh folks, it starts describing this incredible mercy of God. To proclaim the good news, to set at liberty the captives, to release the captives, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord. You see what He's saying right here? He's saying as God, it's as if we get this picture that judgment and mercy hold hands, and they begin to walk with one another.

And God prefers mercy. And so He goes to His people and He extends them one more chance to get right with Him. Do you remember in Luke 13, the parable of the fig tree? Do you remember how there's a guy that Jesus said, do you think that those in Siloam were worse sinners than all the rest? That the tower fell on? Or those that Pilate mingled their blood with their sacrifices? I tell you no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

And then He told a parable to kind of communicate where they were at. And the parable was this. There was a certain man who had a fig tree, and he looked for fruit on it for three years, and it was producing none.

And he said, cut it down. That is, take the axe and chop the roots. And there was a guy there, the husbandman, the tender of the vineyard, who came to intervene.

And he says, wait, don't do that just yet. Let me fertilize it. Let me work with it.

Let me do a little bit more. And if it bears fruit, good. But if not, then you can cut it down.

Jesus' ministry, most people agree, was three and a half years. And in that parable, it is a picture of Him interceding with the Father. And He's saying, Father, please give this nation just one more year to come back to Me.

Now, folks, where are we in America right now? Do you know whenever we come to a particular place that we need revival, God begins to address and do certain things that begins to reveal our heart. Let me read you the prophecy about Jesus. This is in Luke, chapter 2, and it's in verse 20.

Well, just a second, I've lost it here. Yes, here it is. It's going to be verses 34 and 35.

They take Jesus to the temple, and they present Him before the Lord, and Simeon comes up and makes this prophecy. Simeon blessed them, that's Joseph and Mary, and said to Mary, his mother, Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign which will be spoken against. Yes, a sword will pierce your own soul that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

Do you know what? Our God is a God who often comes and forces a decision. He is a God who hates fence-sitting. In fact, He would prefer we be 100% wicked or 100% righteous instead of mingled.

He said He hates lukewarmness. He will spew that out of His mouth, and He will take and come to His people who are in circumstances where they're trying to fence straddle, and He will suddenly cause circumstances to be such that we have to pick so that our hearts are revealed exactly where we are before God. Have you been seeing God doing that in the last 15 years in this nation? Folks, I don't know about you, but the wickedness is more wicked.

And if we're going to be righteous, the righteousness is going to be clearer. And God is making us choose. One of the things that I noticed out of the trial of our last president, suddenly the words sin, confession, forgiveness, things like that, God suddenly forced that upon the American people so that we had to begin to address and deal with those matters.

And in particular, He was speaking to His own people. And we had to make a stand on where we stood on issues of morality. We had to say whether we believed that character was a qualification for leadership or not.

Ostensibly, President Clinton was on trial in the impeachment process, but in reality, it was our nation that was on trial. And God revealed exactly where our heart was. Have you been watching as the Ten Commandments and other parts of the Christian influence have come into our government that God has forced His own people to take stands regarding our Christian heritage on where we stand? When we see things happen like all of a sudden the gay and the homosexual agenda come to the fore, you know what God is making His people do? He's making us choose.

He's taking a spiritual deposition, and He often comes to test hearts to reveal them so that we will know. Now, if you're a pastor, God has just spoke to you about the state of the flock that you shepherd. He has deliberately orchestrated the circumstances so that we'll know exactly where we are.

Did you know George Barna did another survey within the last month or so? And he asked how many Christians have a biblical worldview, and he had some basic criteria for evaluating what's a biblical worldview, and all it is is just standard doctrine. Do you know that only 8% of Baptists in our churches have a biblical worldview? Is it any wonder, do you realize that America's pursuit of sin is only the logical conclusion of the church's tolerance of it? The society is rotting because we've lost our salt and our light, and God is speaking to us. The preparation for revival comes in the context of a judgment that's already in place.

It says God is over man and nation alike to keep a godless man from ruling, from laying snares for the people. Folks, how much of our leadership across this nation has laid snares for the people? For some reason, He is no longer extending favor to His people. And I've searched the Scripture, and I don't know of a single time in all the Bible that the people of God ever departed from Him, that He did not turn them over to their enemies.

And right now, our enemies are winning on every single front. But I'm afraid we keep looking at the world and talk about how wicked it is, instead of saying, God's speaking to us. When a man's ways pleases the Lord, even his enemies are at peace with him.

There must be something that He's trying to get our attention about. If we're going to get prepared for revival, we must understand that there are belief systems in our hearts and our lives that are offending God, and that we have to have certain changes of mentality. We've got to have the sense of desperation come over our life.

Because, folks, everything about the Scripture, I'm almost out of time, and I'm kind of hesitant to get into this, but I'm going to say it as a sentence. Do you know that on at least three occasions in the Bible, God destroyed His own people? And do you know that a huge majority of each gospel is spent to the last week of Jesus' life when He was warning the Jewish nation, if you don't bear fruit, God is going to take the kingdom from you and give it to someone who bears the fruit of it. The reason is, we're in a love

relationship with God.

It's not love that creates no accountability. We're in a love relationship with a God who requires it. And here's why.

You know where it says, you shall have no other gods before me? I've just had to change my thinking on that recently. Let me tell you what I thought that meant. I've always thought that that meant God ought to have first place in our life.

That's not what that verse is saying. It's saying God ought to have the only place in our life. He's saying, you can't have me and someone else, even if the someone else is in second place.

Because love is exclusive by nature. And God will not share, He does not go after others to cheat on us, therefore He will not allow us to flirt with that. And when we begin to provoke Him, here's what He said about preparations.

He said in Job, if you would prepare your heart, He says, if you would put your idols away and then seek the Lord. But He said in Ezekiel, if any man clings to an idol, this is Ezekiel 14, 1 through 8. If any man clings to an idol and comes and inquires of me, should I be inquired of him at all? Would you think the answer would be no? And God says, but I will answer that man, and here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to basically kill him in front of everybody, that I may seize the house of Israel by the heart, because they're estranged from me.

Folks, He does not tolerate any competitors whatsoever. And right now, we have tons of areas that we're pursuing and running after other things. But God is looking to prepare His people.

And as I understand the circumstances right now, He is extending us the opportunity for mercy. The way that you know it's too late is when He quits doing it. In fact, He said, when I would have healed Ephraim, then his sin was uncovered.

Folks, the sin that's being exposed right now is one of the greatest encouragements that I know of, because it means God wants to heal us. And we've got that invitation this morning. But our American mentality works against us to think that just because we're in a love relationship with God, He's not really that serious about our sin.

And somehow, we've got to be cut to the heart and become absolutely desperate. He really will. Judgment begins with the house of God.

He will destroy America, but He's going to begin with His own people, because He holds those accountable first who know most. Have you been seized by the heart? That's a question we've all got to ask ourselves. As you've watched this, and as we say, folks, if the homosexual agenda succeeds, we are this close to a final judgment.

If the homosexual agenda succeeds, we will see the criminalization of Christianity in America. It's already happened in Canada. One pastor up there took out an ad in the paper stating his views on why homosexuality was wrong.

He didn't even write the Scripture verses out. He just listed the references, and he was fined and jailed because he was using hate literature. That's the Bible.

We will see that in America, and we are this close. We've got to do what Joel says when we see the locust coming, that is, stop everything, run down, and weep and wail between the porch and the altar, and cry out, spare your people, O God. Well, let's spend some time in prayer.

Let me pray for us, and then I want to ask you to pray. Father, I want to thank you that mercy triumphs over judgment, and that you never desire the judgment. It's not your intent.

It's not the purposes you plan from all eternity for your people, and that even now you have been exceedingly more gracious to us than we deserve. And such a graciousness and a love is beyond our comprehension, so that when we look at the dread, awful reality of what it means to be sinning against you, our God, and recognizing, teach us to fear your name, and to number our days aright that we might gain a heart of wisdom. When we see that, Father, that our heart doesn't faint in the process, but to recognize, if you're still speaking, that the invitation is still there.

And so, Father, we just want to cry out to you right now. We want to cry out on behalf of our relationship with you, having our heart broken and crushed because what we've done in our relationship with you, that we've departed from you, and that in the context of the innumerable blessings you showered upon us, your people, in this land. Oh, Lord, will you not turn our hearts back to yourself? Will you not revive us that we may rejoice in your name? Revive us, oh Lord, and then we will call upon your name.

Oh, God, may it indeed happen. Father, help us to be seized in the heart to cry out for this land. I want to ask if you would, would you just, let's spend the remainder of our prayer time, would you just turn to one another in groups of two and three, don't get a very large group, but just turn to one another in groups of two or three, and let us look simultaneously at the impending judgment on the people of God.

Let us set it in the context of a love relationship with Him so that we're more crushed by what we've done against Him, even then we're afraid of the judgment. And then let us be encouraged to know that the door is yet open a little while longer and come back with all our heart. Let us cry out for the sake of our children, our wives, and our land.

Let us turn with all our heart. Would you just do that right now in groups of two and three and let's pray together.

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