

(A Divine Visitation) Unreckoned

by Richard Owen Roberts

Richard Owen Roberts emphasizes the importance of recognizing and preparing for divine visitations to avoid missing God's transformative work in our lives and communities.

Duration: 1:19:44

Scripture: Luke 19:1-44, Luke 19:47 - 20:8

Topics: "Divine Visitation", "Spiritual Repentance"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the topic of divine visitations. He starts by expressing his concern for the state of cities and churches, suggesting that if Jesus were to approach them today, he would weep over their condition. The preacher emphasizes that the cause for tears is the lack of understanding and recognition of the things that bring peace. He explains that God hides his visitation from those who have eyes that do not see, ears that do not hear, and hearts that cannot receive. The sermon also mentions the doom that awaits those who fail to recognize their day of visitation, using the example of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The preacher concludes by highlighting the importance of not missing the Lord when he comes and the opportunity for repentance and refreshing from the presence of the Lord.

Transcript

What a wonderful privilege is mine to be here with you and to share what God has put upon my heart. A number of years ago, the little ministry with which I'm involved, which is called International Awakening Ministries, felt the time had come to regularly publish a little journal, which we called Revival Commentary. Unfortunately, I ran out of strength to do it and all the other things, and it dropped by the wayside.

But a few issues were published. And in one of those issues, I wrote an article entitled The Nomenclature of Revival. A few of you may have seen it.

In my mind, it was a perfectly wonderful article, not so much the one that wrote it, but the content of it. Because what it did was to take the 20-some terms that had been used over the century to describe these wondrous movements of God's spirit. They've been called rain from heaven.

They've been called awakenings and, as I just said, many other names. But one of those was divine visitation. Now, at the time that the article appeared, it seemed to me it would be lovely if somewhere along the line, I had opportunity to preach a series of sermons on each of these terms.

But in actual fact, it never came until recently. As I was praying over the subjects that I ought to deal with, it occurred to me that I ought truly to speak to you on this subject of divine visitations. However, after I had prayed much and done a good deal by way of preparation, I realized I was in trouble because I had four messages and only three opportunities between the two weeks to give these messages.

And I was quite up against it, wondering what to do. And out of the blue, it seemed, Nancy Wells, the coordinator and hard worker who's put this all together, called and said, we would like you to take an additional service. And I thought, well, now, truly, if I needed confirmation, well, there it is.

But the awkward aspect of it was that it was to be divided over two different sessions. But the happy realization I came to after arriving was anyone here could access the two from last week. And word has already been given as to how to do that.

And it may indeed be announced further if any of you are needing help. But let me in a moment review the matters that I covered last week and then tell you what's on my heart for today and for one additional session. I don't know how many of you preachers ever preached on the song of Zacharias in Luke, chapter 1, an incredibly beautiful two-stanza song.

But he speaks in each stanza of a divine visitation. In the first stanza, he speaks of the visit of the horn of salvation. And in the second paragraph, really, which is rejoicing, I shouldn't say paragraph, stanza, which is rejoicing over the fact that his own son is to be the forerunner, he rejoices and sings his hallelujahs to the Lord because of the impending visit of the sunrise from on high.

If you have not familiarized yourself with that song, I would heartily encourage you to do so. In the second message last week, it seemed necessary to go to the actual work of the forerunner concerning whom his father had sung. And so I was dealing last Saturday night with Luke, chapter 3. Now, I hope it isn't true, but someone said I spoke for two hours and 20 minutes.

I'm not allowed to do that. And surely, I dare not. And someone on the front row, as it looks like I'm trespassing, can do a little something like this.

And I'll keep the time in mind. But oh, how urgent it is to prepare for these divine visitations. John, in the most incredible fashion, prepared the way of the Lord.

And I believe that each one of us who is here now must think very carefully and prayerfully about what we need to do to prepare our hearts and to prepare the way of the Lord. And in that God gave us each two ears, I'd like to make a simple suggestion, figurative, of course, but nonetheless significant. Use one ear to listen for your own heart, to hear what God the Lord says to you concerning the needs in your life by way of making preparation for the coming of the Lord in one of these precious divine visitations.

But let the other ear listen with great care for your church, your pastor, those in your circle of responsibility. What a tragedy when God visits his people, and many of them miss his visitation. Now, my dear friends, you don't have to know very much about church history to know that many, many in the past have missed the Lord when he came.

And our passage this afternoon deals with this critical issue. So I'm inviting you now to turn, if you will please, to the Gospel of Luke at chapter 19. Our focus is only upon three verses as our basic text, but a host of additional material.

We will be reading verses 41 to 44 of Luke chapter 19. Let me repeat. This passage is about a very significant body of those who thought themselves believers in God Almighty and his followers who missed their appointed visitation.

And before I read the passage, I want to mention what the fourth passage is that I have upon my heart and hope to speak about later this week. And that is from the book of Acts chapter 4, where in a strange and a wonderful way, those who crucified Christ are offered the opportunity of repenting and returning and enjoying a season of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. You're ready? Luke 19, verse 41.

And when he approached, he saw the city and wept over it, saying, if you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace, but now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the day shall come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you and surround you and hem you in on every side and will level you to the ground and your children within you. And they will not leave in you one stone upon another because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.

What a heart-rending passage. Well, some perhaps don't feel that because that was the Pharisees and the scribes and the chief priests. Yes, but they were people too, people who needed the Lord, people who were loaded up with religious convictions and concerns, people who honestly thought they were right with God and ready for anything God sent.

But they missed it. And would it not be terribly foolish to suppose that we are sufficiently unlike them so that we are in no danger whatsoever of missing our time of visitation? And in that I've already asked you to listen for yourself and for your church, your pastor, those in your immediate realm of concern, how tragic if you should receive the visitation and others you love and are responsible for should miss the Lord's coming. And you do understand, don't you, that revivals are always divine visitation, times when God draws near to his people.

Now, let's be sure we understand the context in which these words that we have read occur. If you go back to the beginning of this 19th chapter, you will discover in verses 1 to 10, our Lord's encounter with Zacchaeus. And in verse 7, right in the midst of that encounter with Zacchaeus, you will read the protest of certain of the leaders that Christ should associate himself with someone as abominable as Zacchaeus and other tax collectors and sinners.

Then in verses 11 to 27, we have the parable of the nobleman and his money. And that is very relevant because, indeed, that parable, along with numerous other parables of our Lord, was directed immediately at these persons who missed his divine visit. Then in verses 28 to 40, we have the triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

And again, right in the midst of that triumphal entry, the protest of the religious leaders and the taunting and mean-spirited statements that they made. And then verses 47 to 48, or excuse me, 45 to 46, leaping over the passage we've read, we have the second cleansing of the temple. And how much good did the second cleansing of the temple do? Why, just the same amount of good that the first cleansing did.

Drove them out one door and they streamed in another. Isn't it tragic that when God, in incredible mercy, brings about some kind of a righteous judgment like a cleansing of the temple, there are multitudes that sees no significance in it, are unchanged by it, and persist in their error? And in this instance, even a second cleansing had no greater impact, it appears, than the first. And then at the end of this 19th chapter, verses 47 and 48, you read of their determination to destroy this one who had brought to them the

greatest of blessings and the blessing they desperately needed, but were not willing to receive.

And the next chapter opens in verses 1 to 8, chapter 20, with a controversy concerning his authority and who did he think he was to say and to do things like this. But let's look at the portion we read. And just in a moment or two, examine the statements that are made.

Our Lord, verse 41, approaches the city and weeps over it. Do you think that our Lord today could approach your city and do anything other than weep over it? Or take your own church, do you think he could draw near to your church and do anything other than to weep bitter tears? And in verse 42, the cause for tears is clearly indicated, if you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace, but now they have been hidden from your eyes. Now, you see, that is really at the heart of the danger that God should hide from our eyes his visitation.

And we need to be certain we understand why God would do such a thing. And my purpose today is to help you to see why our Lord made it crystal clear. You have eyes that do not see.

You have ears that do not hear. You have hearts that cannot receive. And in verses 43 and 44, he describes the doom before them.

The day will come when your enemies will throw up a bank before you. They'll surround you. All understand this occurred literally in the year 70, a war around them.

They were surrounded by enemies, hemmed in on every side. And they were leveled to the ground. And even those mothers bearing children and those fathers' seed, yet to be planted, lost.

Not one stone remaining upon another because they did not recognize their day of visitation. Many of you have heard preachers like myself lay out as carefully as we know how the difference between remedial judgments and final judgment. I shall not take that up now.

But clearly, we are looking at a final judgment. When all hope is gone, when there's not one possibility in all the world of their repenting, they had their opportunity. And they refused to bend.

And so what we have in this passage is not a call to repentance, but an announcement of doom. Oh, but what a happy thing it is for me to say to you, we have no announcements of doom to be pronounced upon this body today. We have only hope and expectations that in this incredible grace, he will yet visit us.

But I beg of you, do not miss his visit. I want to take just a few moments to review something of what lay behind all of this. Did it ever occur to you that at the time Christ was born and the magi approached Herod and asked concerning the place of the child's birth, Herod summoned these very people into his presence and revealed to them something of what was in his heart? Did you notice that in the past? Did you say to yourself, now surely the beginning of great evil in the hearts of these men is crystal clear? Matthew chapter 2, verses 1 to 6 lay this out.

And in the next few moments, what I hope to do is to simply trace through Matthew's gospel a bit of the history of what brought these religious leaders to that point where they missed their divine visitation. You understand, don't you, that the problem was obvious to John the Baptist? Listen to these words from chapter 3 of Matthew at verse 7. When he saw many of the Sadducees and the Pharisees coming for baptism, he said to them, you brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore, bring forth fruit in keeping with your repentance. There's an important record in Luke chapter 7, verse 30,

that the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John.

Unlike many a Baptist preacher in America, he didn't baptize those hypocrites. And oh, that God might give us a spirit of discernment, and that we might learn who we must not baptize, along with those who indeed, by God's grace, are ready for that wonderful ordinance. Did you ever consider the Sermon on the Mount in relationship to these scribes and Pharisees, these Sadducees and hypocrites? In chapter 5 of Matthew, verses 10 to 12, our Lord was describing the blessing of being persecuted.

But the persecutors to whom he was making specific reference were these very men addressed in Luke 19. In verse 20 of chapter 5, our Lord said, unless your righteousness surpasses the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, you cannot be part of the kingdom. In verses 21 to 48, chapter 5, our Lord went through a series of statements.

You have heard it said, but I say unto you, all of them dealing with these Pharisees, these Sadducees, their saying, their viewpoints, their judgment. And then in chapter 6, starting at verse 1, a series of statements where our Lord said, beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them. Now, there's a summary statement of the heart of these men.

They practiced their righteousness before men to be seen by them. Is there a danger that you've been practicing righteousness before men to be seen by them? Indeed, I dare to think that many here, if the record were open wide, would quickly crawl under the seat, because it would be revealed that much of their practice of righteousness is immediately related to being seen of men. Our Lord spoke to them about alms, chapter 6, verses 2 to 4. He spoke about prayers, verses 5 to 13.

He spoke about forgiveness, verses 14 and 15. He spoke about fasting, verses 16 to 18. He spoke about piling up treasures, verses 19 to 34.

He spoke about judging one another, chapter 7, verses 1 to 5. He talked about casting pearls before swine. In verse 6, he talked about false prophets, verses 15 to 20. The bulk of the Sermon on the Mount has an immediate application to these individuals who were not prepared for their day of visitation.

It's time we face some of these issues with the kind of care that they deserved. Move over to chapter 9, verses 1 to 8 of Matthew's gospel. They labeled Christ a blasphemer for granting forgiveness to a paralytic.

Then, verses 10 to 13 of this same 9th chapter, they were offended and registered their complaints because he ate with publicans and sinners. In verse 34 of chapter 9, they claimed that Christ cast out demons by the ruler of the demons. And in chapter 10, verses 16 to 23, when our Lord sent his disciples out, he said to them, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.

And again, it's clearly these same men who are the wolves that our Savior is warning his disciples concerning. If you move to chapter 11 of Matthew's gospel, verses 20 to 24, Christ reproached their cities because with the incredible miracles that had occurred in them, they still would not repent. And in verse 25 of chapter 11, Jesus praised his Father because he hid these things from the wise and the intelligent, and he revealed them to babes.

And there's no question who the wise and intelligent were. Maybe somehow you've been deluded by your brilliance. Maybe you've put more stock in your education and abilities than they deserve.

It is often those who amount to nothing in the sight of the world who understand the things pertaining to divine visitation. And oh, may God grant that not one here will miss their season of visitation. In chapter 12 of Matthew's gospel, verses 22 to 45, they blasphemed against the Holy Spirit, having already, as recorded in 12.14, regularly plotted together to destroy Christ.

But in that same chapter, at verse 2, they had accused his followers of unlawful conduct because they picked grain and ate it as they were passing through. And our Lord, as I mentioned earlier, often revealed their plight and parables. But in chapter 13, verses 10 to 17, he explained with great care what that plight was.

While they see, he said, they do not see. While hearing, they do not hear. Nor do they understand.

And our Lord gave that as an explanation for his use of parables. And you know perfectly well, they were more concerned about the traditions of the elders than the commandments of God. And our Lord addressed this in chapter 15, 1 to 14.

Jesus labeled them as hypocrites. He said, this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men.

And in chapter 16, verses 1 to 20, they ask him for a sign. And they were told, an evil and an adulterous generation ask for signs. And then he had to warn his disciples, beware of the leaven of the Pharisee.

And our Lord, on a number of occasions, told his disciples that he must suffer many things from the elders, and the chief priest, and the scribes, and be killed by them. For instance, chapter 16, verse 21. Chapter 17, verses 22 to 23.

Chapter 18, or excuse me, chapter 20, verse 18. And then when it came time for the triumphal entry, they were full of anger. And they made awful expressions of their indignation.

Chapter 21, verses 15 to 16. And then our Lord directed the entire parable of the landowner against them. And for it, they sought to seize him, but they were afraid of the multitude.

Chapter 21, verses 33 to 46. In chapter 22, verses 15 to 46, they sought to trap him by subtle arguments concerning poll taxes and other silly things. And then finally, chapters 26 and 27.

They crucified the Lord of glory. It's bad enough to miss your visitation, but I don't believe the situation today is all that much different from then. It seems to me the evidence is mounting up substantially that many are jealous.

That many are envious. That many grow angry with the Lord when he rebukes them through one of his servants. Indeed, I don't wonder, but there are gathered with us any number of pastors who are hurting because of the abuse heaped upon you by those in your congregation who are missing their day of visitation.

And all around us are men plunging into moral iniquity. And others who we described as burned out, who have lost their heart and their confidence in the Lord, and who, too, are missing their visitation. I pause again and ask, please, please, don't live through the days of this conference and miss the visitation God has for you.

And do everything in your power to hear on behalf of your church and others so that they will not miss what God has in store for them. But having given you that quick rundown, I want you to turn now to Matthew's gospel, chapter 23. And let us focus more particularly upon what our Lord reveals in this 23rd chapter of Matthew's gospel.

In verses 1 to 7, our Lord provides a summary statement about these persons of whom I have been speaking to you already. Let me read starting at verse 21. That's Matthew 23.

Excuse me, not verse 21, verse 1. Matthew 23, verse 1. Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to his disciples, saying, the scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses. Is it possible that the position you occupy you grabbed, you fought for, you struggled to get to? I've observed many a situation of a man rising to prominence. And all along his path are those he's knocked down and stood upon to get where he is.

And it's not just a few brutal fellows who have the capacity to behave that way. There are multitudes who have seated themselves in the seat of Moses. Give that some careful consideration.

It surely deserves it. He then goes on to say in verse 3, therefore, all that they tell you to do and observe, do. But do not do according to their deeds, for they say things and they do not do them.

And did we not already have a statement about that in that wonderful opening session of a few moments ago? Was not God gracious to begin this conference with that precious time? But ought we not to ask our hearts with great integrity, are there things I'm lining out for others to do that I do not do myself? Is there not huge danger for every teacher and preacher of laying out carefully instructions for the congregation or the class that they have no real heart to pursue themselves? It is not just scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, chief priests, and elders that miss their time of visitation. There are sweet-spirited elderly ladies who look almost like heaven in clothes, who are as in great danger as the vile reprobates of our society. Do you do what you instruct others to do? In verse 4, our Lord said, they tie up heavy loads and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.

And thereto we have to honestly examine ourselves and our conduct. Are we in any way guilty of piling loads upon people that they are weary of carrying and wilting under the weight? And we ourselves are so disconnected with God and His purpose, we don't even use a single finger. But our Lord doesn't leave it there.

Notice what He says next. They do all their deeds to be noticed by men, for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. But ought we not to pause and honestly ask, how much of what I appear to be and to do is because of my desire to be noticed by others? Are we not finding many around us who live more off the praises of men than the praises of God? I don't believe anyone is automatically immune from such conduct.

This type of evil is so easily slipped into. In just a passing conversation out in the hallway, somehow the subject of hardening the heart came up. And I asked a brother, what did God have to do to harden Pharaoh's heart? And the answer, nothing, nothing whatsoever.

It is only God's grace operating in us that keeps our hearts soft. And once we disconnect, even for a brief season from our Savior, our hearts start to harden. And these atrocious acts and deeds begin to accumulate, even so much as engaging in our religious exercises to be seen of man.

I remember a season when I had really gotten ever so determined and careful to conduct the morning hours every day with an extended season of prayer and focus upon the Word. And I caught myself one day telling others. And immediately it came to me, you Pharisee, this is not so much to draw near to God as to be seen of man.

Let us with great integrity probe deeply into our hearts. Then notice in verse 6, they love the place of honor at banquets. They couldn't conceive of taking the most obscure seat.

He goes on to say in verse 6, they love the chief seats in the synagogue. And then he adds in verse 7, they love respectful greetings in the marketplaces. And then he even goes so far as to say they love being called Rabbi by man.

Where do those specific issues hit home? And must we not be thoroughly aware that to whatever degree we line up with these scribes, Pharisees, and hypocrites, we are in great danger of missing our time of visitation. But there's more in this chapter that it's necessary to look at very carefully. Our Lord moves from those men to us.

Chapter 23, verses 8 to 12. Verse 8, but do not be called Rabbi, for one is your teacher, and you are all brothers. I'm appalled.

I'm going to speak plainly. I don't know how this happened, but somewhere along the line, somebody gave me a doctor's degree. I never earned it.

It was never official. I'm no doctor at all, but it keeps getting plastered on me. I've told many groups I have no doctorate, and I know there's a great deal of kindness that's extended often in those honorary degrees.

But what's wrong with my name? My folks thought it was all right, and they gave it to me. Or what's wrong with brother or mister? Or if you're a friend, Dick. Or if you're a stranger wishing to be personal, Richard.

Or if you don't know what else to do, go back to what I said in the beginning, Richard O. Roberts, that's been on my person since the beginning of my day. But now let's take the term reverend. What a shock it is when a person steps up to me and says, oh, I'm Reverend Jones.

I'd like to belt them. Do you realize what a despicable act it is to call yourself reverend? Can you imagine a judge stepping up to you and saying, hello, I'm Honorable Jones. These are titles and descriptive words that are bestowed upon us by others.

So if you're introducing your pastor to a stranger, you can appropriately say, if he's a mister, you can use one expression, if he's a doctor, another. I would like you to meet my pastor, the Reverend Doctor, and give his name. Or the Reverend Mister.

But to take that title upon yourself! And I'm never more greatly offended than when some woman steps up to me and says, I'm Reverend so-and-so. In her case, I don't wish to belt her. I just desire to be out of there right now.

But I put it in a light fashion. But these Pharisees love their titles. And what about you? Do you find that a good bit of who you are hangs on your titles? Now, there are legitimate titles.

I do not wish to embarrass my dear brother Kinlaw, but it will not be inappropriate for me to say this. He doesn't know this. My family came from Schenectady, New York.

And Dr. Kinlaw courted a girl who was a member of our church, the First Presbyterian Church of Schenectady, New York. I was smart. He was smart.

But this is what he doesn't know. My dad was immensely impressed with Dennis Kinlaw. Deeply moved.

Wonderfully stirred. Dozens, if not hundreds of times, my father spoke to me about Dennis Kinlaw, commending him to me as an example of both a learned and a godly man. I'm not stretching anything when I refer to him as Dr. Kinlaw.

He did a lot of hard work, and he earned a degree. And we readily, gladly ascribe that term to him. And I'm not speaking, you see, against the legitimate use of legitimate terms.

But when ego is involved, when you can't live with just being plainly yourself, when you require something more, and just as an addendum to that, this last week, we had a report from his granddaughter that just sent shivers up our spine. And she and one of her friends were here, and they gave us a description of that sweet and precious movement of the Spirit of God at Asbury College in recent days. Oh, it was lovely.

I wish you could have all been here to experience and to enjoy their description of the visitation of God. But you see, in this passage, we're dealing with men who love titles. And our Lord is very severely warning us, don't get caught in this treacherous trap.

One is your teacher, or are your brother. And some of you may need to do some serious repenting. And I'm just going to take one more whack at those fellows who call themselves doctor, and all they've got is some miserable little thing they purchased, or some silly school bestowed upon them, and it has no real meaning.

Well, if the school wishes to honor you, that's all right, but you don't have to sport that. And if I had a hundred of those honorary degrees, I wouldn't dare stand beside Dr. Kinlaw and use my degree. But it's the heart behind this that our Lord is concerned about.

This need of the acclamation and affirmation. Look at verse 9. Do not call anyone on earth your father, for one is your father, he who is in heaven. And do not be called leaders, for one is your leader, that is Christ.

But the greatest among you shall be your servant, and whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted. So our Lord has described, pinpointed in precision, these scribes, Pharisees, and hypocrites, and then warned us of specific areas where we must exercise the greatest care. But let us move now from Christ's summary of them and his warnings to us to the woes that he pronounced upon them.

Again, chapter 23, starting at verse 31. But woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You shut off the kingdom of heaven from men, for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. It's not stretching the truth to observe that there are men in ministry who are literally barring the way to the kingdom of God.

And partially that's done by teaching one thing and living another. No hypocrite ever helped another to find the Lord. And partly it's done by false doctrine.

Partly it's done by legalism. There are all kinds of ways in which it can be accomplished. But every one of us must carefully, before the Lord asks the question, am I in any way shutting up the kingdom of God so

that others cannot enter? And look at verse 14.

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You devour widows' houses even while for a pretense you make long prayers. Therefore you shall receive greater condemnation. I'm aware of a pastor in our country who is presently engaged in a major lawsuit because he managed to manipulate a woman's estate and pocketed a huge sum of money himself.

Our ability to sin is endless. And oh, what care we must exercise that because of our sin we miss our time of visitation when it comes. Look at verse 15.

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte and when he becomes a proselyte you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourself. Many of you realize that we are truly living in a season of epidemic immorality among the clergy. Incredible numbers caught in pornographic interest on the internet.

I mentioned last week to the dear folk who were present that on the Sundays when I'm not preaching out of town, I'm preaching in the First Baptist Church of St. Charles, Illinois in what is for me a very heart-rending situation. I had known the pastor there for years. I thought we were of one mind and heart.

But after years and years and years of ministry, he had to be removed from the church on a moral matter. And since August I've been meeting with those dear folk trying to help them over this terrible season. Why many of our most energetic evangelists who travel all over earth and cross every sea to make converts end up making them twofold more children of the devil than themselves because their own personal conduct totally undoes their entire life of witness and ministry.

There isn't a single person here that does not have the capacity to do incredible damage to those they have longed to help. And believe me, almost daily I remind myself years ago there were one or two people that heard you and reported that they had been helped. And then a few more, and a few more.

And while those who have been helped by me still constitute a terribly small number, it's a whole lot larger number than ten years ago. And what if, what if I were now to fall? And all those who by God's grace found some measure of help were to have that completely swept out from under them. Because I linked myself with the scribes and Pharisees and hypocrites and taught one thing and lived another, traveled the earth trying to make proselytes, and then ended up making them much the worse.

I don't believe a single pastor here can dare to avoid this severe issue. We must, we must walk with the Lord. As I said concerning the hardening of the heart, how long does it take to find your heart hardened? Why, I should think twenty-four hours is more than enough.

And a week of neglect, of holiness, and of the Word, and of prayer could set a man up for an incredibly awful fall. And just because we're not exactly like these scribes, Pharisees, and hypocrites doesn't mean we are not headed in their direction. And with ease could join them.

But look now at verses 16 to 22. Woe, says our Lord, to you blind guides who say, whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing. But whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is a blind.

You fools and blind men. Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? And whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing. But whoever swears by the offering upon it, he is obliged.

You blind men. Which is more important, the offering or the altar that sacrifices the offering? Therefore, he who swears, swears both by the altar and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by him who dwells within it.

And he who swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it. Now, I think one could summarize all that by saying nonsense. Nonsense.

Many a preacher is devoted to nonsense. My word, you listen to him and you say to yourself, what a brilliant fellow. But the sum of everything he said is nothing.

It's possible to speak in such a way that huge crowds are swayed and moved. But when they analyze your sermon, they discover it's just words. Silly words often, absurd, self-contradicting words sometimes, and positions, practices that just simply boil down to nonsense.

And again, I don't think any of us are automatically immune. I believe with all my heart that we must with the greatest diligence be certain that none of these things come upon us and we miss our day of visitation. Drop, if you will, to verse 23.

Woe to you scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites, for you tithe mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the way to your provisions of the law, justice and mercy and faithfulness. But these things you should have done without neglecting the others, you blind guides who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel. Now let's look at it from the standpoint of these things you ought to have done and not to have left undone these others.

What undone things remain? Some of you have vowed a large number of times to become a man or a woman of prayer. It remains undone. Some of you have vowed to master the Scriptures.

It remains undone. Some have vowed to focus their hearts upon holiness. And it remains undone.

We don't have to restrict this to the subject of tithes. We don't have to concern ourselves with the true significance of Christ's words about their going into the spice cabinet and paying their tithes out of what they find there. This issue touches home with every one of us where there are things that we ought to have done and still ought to do and yet they remain undone.

Many have acknowledged when it comes to the subject of divine visitations that the road to revival is often a difficult road. And that's true. There's no denying it.

My dear wife Maggie and I at one time were under extremely heavy difficulties. And one day we just sort of looked at one another and she voiced what I was thinking. Do you know what... She said to me, Do you know, Dick, what we have to do to get out from under all of this? And I looked at her and I said, Maggie, you're not thinking of it, are you? No, she said, absolutely not.

But it was so clear to me this morning when I was meeting with the Lord that all we had to do to get out from under this incredible weight of difficulty was to abandon our prayer and our concern for revival. Everyone that I've watched closely who has come under a burden for revival and kept under it has experienced extraordinary levels of pain and difficulty. These things you ought to have done.

Yes. But don't leave the other things undone. Every single person here should be under the weight of the need of revival.

It should press more heavily upon us than virtually anything we can think of because as has been stated here already, revival is God in the midst of His people. And nothing is more urgent, nothing is more wonderful. I hope all of you often reflect upon those words of Psalm 73, The nearness of God is my God.

And oh, that God might draw near not for a matter of moments or even days, but that we might know a season of divine visitation that stretches year after year until the whole of our society is turned on its ear and remarkable evangelism occurs and reformation. But look now at this next woe. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.

For you clean the outside of the cup. This is verse 25. You clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside they're full of robbery and self-indulgence.

You blind Pharisees. First clean the inside of the cup and of the dish so that the outside of it may be clean also. Is there any possibility that someone here has done a lovely job of cleaning the externals? And you look like a shining and a bright believer, but inside, inside, the old man still reigns.

All the filth and the corruption of the sinner's heart is in your heart, though outside you are a very impressive person. Surely each of us must concern ourselves with this issue as our Lord lays it out. Then move to verse 28.

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. For you're like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they're full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. And then he adds in verse 28, even so you outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

There's an obvious connection with verses 27 and 28 and 25 and 26. But move now to verses 29 and 31. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.

For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous and say, why, if we'd been living in those days, the days of our father, we would not have been partners with them in the shedding of the blood of the prophets. Consequently, our Lord says, you bear witness against yourselves that you are the son of those who murdered the prophet. Now on the surface, many that I meet with profess to love serious and deep biblical preaching.

But if it runs over an hour, that's another matter. Or if it touches their life and it's crystal clear, they're the sinner that needs to repent. They claim they would never persecute a prophet of the Lord.

They seem to share embarrassment over their fathers who did so. But in actual fact, they only love the prophet as long as he's touching others and not themselves. And what about you? If indeed one of the prophets of the Old Testament were preaching here today and preaching as they always did, what would your true reaction to them be? But again, I want to remind you I've asked you to use both ears.

And you say, well, at least on that one, I do honestly love the most fervent and direct preaching. And I can even sit still for hours if indeed the Word of God is coming to me. But many of you associate with other professed believers who have no appetite at all for the Word of God.

And it is not part of our task in this hour to concern ourselves with others. Because while we would be grieved to miss our own visitation, would we not be grieved to miss the visitation of God to those we love? We have two children. A son who has six children and a daughter who suffers a severe brain difficulty.

And to our knowledge, she will never be able to marry. And the likelihood is the six grandchildren we have are going to be the top number. We were with them a couple of days last week.

I would hate to enjoy a divine visitation and to have my grandchildren miss it. My dear brother Kinlaw said to me before this meeting how his heart leapt with joy when his granddaughter spoke of that which had happened in her heart. Is not every one of us here as burdened for those we know and love as we are for ourselves? And when we call out to God for revival, is it not above all to His glory? And will He not receive the greater glory if all those we know and love and millions and millions beyond them are touched by this same divine visitation? We must listen for others and commit ourselves to do absolutely everything in our power to assure to whatever degree God makes possible that they not miss their hour of visitation when it comes.

To this end, some of us need to get a whole lot more serious in our preaching and teaching to this end. Many of us, perhaps a majority, need to get a whole lot more serious about prayer and about cleaning up our own lives and making ready the way of the Lord. But there's one last woe in this passage that I must call to your attention.

It's worse than a woe. Look at verses 32 and 33. Our Lord reports the consequence.

Consequently, you bear witness against yourselves that you are the sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers, you serpents, you brooded vipers. How shall you escape the sentence of hell? Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes.

Some of them you will kill and crucify. And some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly, I say to you, all these things shall come upon this generation.

Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate.

For I say to you, from now on, you shall not see me until you say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. But look at verse 32 again. Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers.

I wonder how many of you recognize that to every single entity on earth, God has granted a measure of sin. And when that measure of sin is full, the wrath of God is upon that entity to the utmost. Read again, 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, where our Lord reported that the Jews who crucified Christ and worked hard to keep others from hearing the apostles' message had actually succeeded in filling up their measure of sin and were then and there under the wrath of God to the utmost.

I don't think most of us are anywhere near serious enough about these matters. Say to your own heart, God Almighty has allotted to me a measure of sin. If that measure ever fills up, I am under the wrath of God to the utmost.

As I said earlier, this passage is not an appeal. This passage is a proclamation. For these to whom our Lord spoke, it was too late.

Their measure of sin was full. The wrath of God was upon them to the utmost. They would not repent.

When our Lord, looking over the temple site, said, Your house is left unto you desolate. He meant that precisely. He left the temple in Jerusalem never ever to return again.

Although He spoke those words sometime around the year 33, and it was not until the year 70 the temple was destroyed. Nonetheless, in those years between His proclamation and their destruction, they went on carrying their religion on as if God were there. Surely every one of us who is here today must face the possibility, even for ourselves, but certainly for our nation, that we cannot persist forever in our path of wickedness.

But the happy thing, the joyful thing, the thing that thrills my heart, even as I finish this afternoon, is that the day of mercy is still ours. Will you commit your heart, even before we leave this room, to see to it that there's no possible way you can miss your time of visitation? And will you set your heart as well on behalf of those for whom you bear responsibility that by God's grace they too will know their time of visitation? And take these words concerning the Pharisees and the scribes and the hypocrites to heart. For these words reveal precisely why they missed their time of visitation.

Grant, O Lord, such focus in our hearts, such determination in our spirits, such all-out commitment to our dear and wonderful Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, that not one here and none for whom they are concerned will miss the season of visitation. And to the Lord Jesus Christ, who has so kindly helped us through these passages of Scripture, and whose blood, even now, is our soul's hope of cleansing, we raise our voices and our hearts in praise and adoration, both now and by your grace forever. Amen.

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