

Change Our Heart's - Part 4

by Richard Owen Roberts

Richard Owen Roberts emphasizes the necessity of understanding God's righteous judgments and the transformative power of scripture in the life of believers.

Duration: 1:16:33

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 3:23, Revelation 20:11-15

Topics: "Repentance", "Restoration"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the book of Judges, specifically chapters 2 through 16. The main theme is the cycle of sin, judgment, repentance, and restoration that the Israelites go through repeatedly. The speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding and acknowledging the judgments of God as a means of returning to a right relationship with Him. The sermon also highlights the need for personal response to God's judgments and the potential for profound conversion and forgiveness of sins.

Transcript

In the year 1957, I accepted a call to the University Park Congregational Church in Portland, Oregon. I knew that the Lord himself had called me to the itinerancy, but I was convinced I needed some experience as a pastor so that I would be kindly in subsequent years to men in pastoral ministry. At the time I first looked over that church, and they looked over me, it became quite apparent that there was certainly not more than one Christian in the church.

As it turned out, I was mistaken in that, for the person who I felt was a Christian proved otherwise. But on the other hand, there did appear an elderly gentleman, not thought very highly of by the congregation, but I think in touch with God. And he had been praying that the Lord would send someone just like me.

I went there with the tremendous conviction that God was going to do something wonderful, that he was going to use his word as I preached it. That conviction had grown out of an experience. I had been in the seminary.

And had begun to doubt very seriously the authenticity of the Old Testament scripture. The nature of the seminary curriculum, really, was to undermine what little faith existed in the hearts of the students. As I grew increasingly troubled by what was happening to me, and mindful that others around me were experiencing similar things, many of them simply dropped out.

Many of them not only dropped out of preparation for ministry, but out of all interest in Christian faith. But eventually, the impact of it on me was so great that I determined to talk with the dean of the school, who had treated me warmly from the time of my arrival there. I made an appointment, went to his office, told him about the heart problem I was suffering.

And he said to me, I want you to guarantee me that you will do exactly what I'm going to do at the end of the quarter. I said, what is that? No, he said, you trusted me enough to come and talk to me. I want you to promise me that you will do exactly what I'm going to do.

No, I said, I cannot, not without knowing what you're going to do. He said, I'm going to leave here at the end of the quarter. I said, I can do that.

And I did. I'd had an extensive ministry in the Pacific Northwest with headquarters in Spokane, Washington. I returned there, went to the city rescue mission, and told the superintendent, who had been a longtime friend, that I had left the seminary, that my church and my parents were angry with me for having done so, that I had no money, that I was in great personal spiritual difficulty, and that I needed a place where I could seek the face of God.

He said, I have a room for you. You can take your meals with the men in the dining hall, or one of the men will bring your meals to your room. Stay as long as you like.

I holed up in that room for three months, essentially did nothing but pour over the scripture. In particular, I was comparing the old covenant with the new. For where I had been deeply shaken was in terms of confidence in the Old Testament scripture.

It became quickly apparent to me that if I was going to reject the old, I had to reject the new. There are so many quotations of the old in the new, it was simply absurd to try to hold on to one and not the other. But in the providence of God, in those weeks with my nose in the book and my knees regularly bent before the throne of God, I came to the most profound conviction that this book is his word, that I could trust every bit of it, that every bit was as vital as every other bit.

And I vowed to spend the rest of my life studying and proclaiming what I found in this book. So I went to the city of Portland, Oregon with the conviction that if the people in the congregational church there could hear the word of God presented to them in the power of the Holy Spirit, it would transform their lives and the church. On the fourth Sunday, when I was preaching there as pastor, I saw tears coming down the cheeks of one person, one person for sure.

There was a second one that looked very sober, but the angle where they sat was such, I couldn't be certain there were tears. And the third one that I kept glancing at as I preached, thinking God was truly at work. At the end of the sermon, I announced that I would be in the church that afternoon at 3. And if there were any who could no longer live without the knowledge of sins forgiven, they could meet me there.

I was so hopeful that at least one would come. To my astonishment, there were 13, 11 of whom over the next seven days were profoundly converted. That began the closest thing to a genuine revival that I have ever personally seen.

Week after week, the Lord was adding to the church those who were being saved. And I was gathering them in additional meetings each week, teaching them the word of God. But they were all, with the exception of the one old man, just brand new.

They had been all their lives in a liberal congregational church where they had never heard the word of God. And they were trying to understand. We can't seem to get a hold of this.

Why is it now, suddenly, all these things are so real and so wonderful? And all the years past, it was just a lot of silly stuff in which we were engaged. And in trying to help them in one area of understanding in particular, I formulated a simple statement. I said to them that those who profess to be Christians can be divided into three classes.

Those who we could describe as Bible plus, those who could be described as Bible minor, and those who were clearly Bible only. I explained to them that the Bible plus were the cults, the Jehovah Witnesses, and the Seventh-day Adventists, and the Mormons, who all claim to have belief in the scriptures. But the scriptures were not enough.

Something had to be added. And that the Bible minus was our own congregational denomination. The Bible minus whatever in the Bible you don't like.

So you take your scissors, and you clip this out, and you clip that out, and you discover at the end that all you've got is a half a dozen well-threaded pages. Now, I had grown up in an area of the nation where classical liberalism prevailed, and where indeed the bulk of the churches and their leadership had been busily chopping the Bible into bits, and had gladly disregarded it, cast aside vast portions of scripture. But in those days, I remind you, I'm talking about 1957, there was this glorious bunch of believers who were Bible-only, and who really believed that every word of God was indeed given for rebuke, for instruction in righteousness.

But now, who are the Bible-only people? They're largely nonexistent. For millions of those who are in that general category have huge portions of the Bible of which they know nothing and care nothing. They may not have many among them with scissors cutting the Bible into pieces, but because of sheer stupidity and rebellious spirits, huge portions of scripture are disregarded as if they have no consequence.

And one of these vast areas of truth so largely disregarded by so-called evangelical Christians is this whole area of the righteous judgments of God. Some have seriously wondered why, in the light of the circumstances, doesn't the church get down on its face before God and cry out? Well, my impression is that the bulk of the church thinks God is doing handstands of excitement in heaven and cartwheels. He is so pleased with the church.

And I find very few who have any serious interest in all of scripture. The interest is in narrow portions that make us feel good about ourselves. We have incredible ability to take the omnipotent God of scripture and to recreate him in a midget God a half inch bigger than ourselves.

And surely, our great hope this weekend is that we will return to the God of the Bible. And as you well understand, it has been the commitment of the leader to hope and pray that this return will be greatly helped by a careful consideration of the remedial judgment of God. Now, just to help to give you a further sense of the magnitude of this matter in scripture, let me just lay out in front of you 21 passages in which the remedial or the final judgments of God are featured.

I'm not going to go into any detail on this list of 21. List of 21 I consider brief. I understood in early years that sermons were supposed to have three points.

And I have myself been guilty on an occasion of a three-point sermon. But I'm not under the impression that there is anything necessarily biblical about that. I don't know, Claude, whether you were there or not, but I remember one time at the Maples Conference when we were meeting at the Congregational Church in Lake Placid.

No, not Lake Placid. Malone, thank you. Yes, Malone, New York.

And they had been saying to themselves, now, if we do this right, maybe we can get some of these liberal Congregationalists to attend this Southern Baptist Conference. Now, let's see, what about getting Roberts to preach and announcing that he's a Congregationalist? So I was to speak at the opening meeting. I had an 18-point sermon that I intended to run through three times, looking at these 18 points from three separate angles.

Well, you can multiply that out. I think that may come to something like 54. And to my absolute astonishment, they had 18 individuals who spoke before me who were requested to give a two- or three-minute statement, but you know how it is.

And I kept glancing at my watch and saying, boy, it's bedtime already, and they haven't come anywhere near the old preacher, and how is he possibly going to give his 18 points to say nothing of his 54? And there, and some of you were there, you remember, the Powerhouse Baptist Church had their representative to speak. And I tell you, I could scarcely stand it. Powerhouse Baptist Church, it portrayed the most weak and asinine and ridiculous picture imaginable.

And I tried not to say anything, but knowing who I am, some of you realize I was sure to say something, and I certainly did, the crux of which is the least you could do is change your name. But not long ago, someone reported to me that God had begun a fresh work in that church and that things were wonderfully improved. So 21 passages depicting these judgments of God.

Genesis chapter 3, verses 1 to 24, the fall of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from the garden. And in particular, I call to your attention verses 23 and 24. Therefore, the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to cultivate the ground from which he was taken.

So he drove the man out. And at the east of the garden of Eden, he stationed a cherubim and the flaming sword, which turned in every direction to guard the way to the tree of life. Now, there's 24 verses just in that first episode of a righteous judgment from God, a remedial judgment in which they were expelled from the garden but given both time and opportunity of repentance.

Genesis 4, verses 1 to 16, the record of Cain. I remember well preaching here at the cedars some years ago on the subject of Cain. And focusing upon that powerful passage, it said, sin is crouching at your door.

And its desire is toward you. But you must master it. Cain never mastered the sin that was crouching at his door.

And so we read in Genesis 4, 11 and 12, now you are cursed from the ground which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you cultivate the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. You shall be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth.

Now, Cain didn't like his judgment, and he protested. But it stuck. So there's another 16 verses, and we've only covered four chapters of Genesis.

I want you to understand, this is a huge matter. And I want to ask you, how can the church remain silent on a subject that occupies such a significant portion of scripture? How can so many of us be so uninformed concerning the righteous judgments of God that are concurrent with sin? Don't think for a moment that I'm covering the whole. I'm just seeking to give you a wee sample.

But Genesis 6 and 7, and even more extensively, Noah and the flood. But these words from Genesis 6 verses 5 and 7. Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent and the thoughts of his heart were only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and he was grieved in his heart.

And the Lord said, I will block out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them. So three entire chapters, 6 to 8, focusing upon the righteous judgments of God. Or chapter 11, verses 1 to 9, the scattering of the people at Babel because of their grievous wickedness.

Verse 8, so the Lord scattered from abroad over the face of the whole earth. And they stopped building the city. So the judgment of Adam and Eve was remedial.

The judgment of Cain was remedial. The judgment in the days of Noah and in the flood was a combination of final and remedial. The bulk of the people obviously taken in a final judgment, but a handful saved by the grace of God in the ark.

Now surely God intended that those saved in the ark should prove radically different from those destroyed in the flood. And again, in the scattering of the people at Babel, another remedial judgment. We jump over to chapter 19 of Genesis, verses 1 to 29, in particular, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

And I read these words from verses 24 and 25. Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven. And he overthrew those cities.

So once more, like the flood, a combination. The vast majority destroyed, but a handful saved. Here's one you may not have thought of, Genesis chapter 20, verses 1 to 18, involving Abraham and Abimelech and Sarah and the wives in Abimelech's household.

We read in verse 18, the Lord had closed all the wombs in the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife. And some of you remember the circumstances. In an act of cowardice, Abraham pretended Sarah was not his wife.

Abimelech seized what he thought was an opportunity and tried to take Sarah into his household. And in a remedial judgment, God sealed the wombs of all the women in the household. In chapter 31 of Genesis, you remember the circumstances.

Jacob had labored long for a wife and then was tricked and labored another long season and was cheated. So we read in verse 24, God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream of the night. And he said to him, be careful that you do not speak to Jacob either good or bad.

Now, you remember, if you recall, the incidents that Laban was in a rage because he had agreed that Jacob should get all the defective animals. And Jacob had taken the spotted and the striped and the oddball cattle. And they had all successfully produced offspring and the rest did not.

And so Jacob ended with these huge flocks and herds. So Laban is going to give Jacob a piece of what he really thinks of him. And the Lord in a dream at night warns him, don't you say anything good or bad to my servant, Jacob.

And then we read in Genesis 31, verse 42, if the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the fear of Isaac had not been for me, this is Jacob speaking, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the toil of my hands, so he rendered judgment last night. Now, God had prospered Jacob's band.

And when Laban determined to take back everything he was claiming as his own, the Lord rendered a judgment and said, you leave my servant alone. You see, there is considerable variety in these judgments. Or consider Exodus, the plagues on Egypt.

And this is another one of these extensive passages covering more or less 10 chapters of Exodus in which the Lord is at work rendering a judgment in favor of his people and against Pharaoh and Egypt. And in verses 26 and 27 of chapter 14, we find not only did the people escape, but the Lord drowned the army of the Egyptians. The Lord said to Moses, stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may come back over the Egyptians.

Over their chariots, over their horsemen. Then the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. So we really have two righteous judgments in this section.

We have that righteous judgment in which Israel was not only allowed to leave Egypt, but God put it in the hearts of certain of the Egyptians to bestow things of great worth. Upon the Israelites. So when they left, they left with a mighty horde of treasures that were given to them.

And then when Pharaoh determined to bring them back, the Lord, in another judgment, took the lives of those in the Egyptian army in pursuit of Israel. And we move along. One of the most helpful and yet the most trying of passages dealing with the judgments of God, Exodus 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, in which the golden calf was made by Aaron.

And the people demonstrated their zeal for evil in the worship of that calf. But what I would call to your attention, I know some of you are well familiar with the passage. Others may not be.

But we have an extraordinary illustration in this incident of God first threatening a final judgment. You remember the words that God spoke to Moses. Get out of the way, Moses.

I'm going to go down and utterly destroy those people. I will raise up out of you, Moses. You alone, Moses.

Nobody else, Moses, but you. I will raise me up a people for myself. And without even knowing what God is angry about, when God says, get out of my way, Moses instead gets right in God's faith.

And he begins to argue with the Lord. Why, Lord, if you destroy these people now, what will the Egyptians say? They will say, what kind of a mad god is it that brings a people out of Egypt by his own mighty arm only to destroy them in the wilderness a short time later? But he also argues, and what about the promises that you've made that remain unfulfilled? Promises to Abraham and to Isaac and Jacob, promises of a seed and of a land. And God, reversing his threatened final judgment.

Beautiful, beautiful pact, without going into all the detail. After Moses himself sees to the death of 3,000 of the ringleaders of this wickedness, God says, go on, Moses. Get moving.

I want you to lead my people as I commanded you, so get going. But I won't go with you myself. You are a stiff-necked people.

If I were with you myself, I would destroy you in the way. I'll send an angel before you. But Moses says, nothing doing.

Angels have their place. But if you don't go with us, we're not going anywhere. And God, in his incredible mercy, says, all right, Moses.

If you won't go without me, I'll go with you. Oh, what a profound lesson for us. We are where we're at because we're willing to go alone.

When we reach that point where we'll go nowhere without him, I believe with all my heart he will gladly come among us. When we talk about these righteous judgments, and I believe Henry has made that clear already this morning, our great problem is not knowing what to do with these judgments. We invariably, it seems, end up doing the wrong thing.

But Moses has it right. If you don't go with us, we're not going anywhere. But let me move on.

I have only mentioned 10. And I have a few more to go if I'm going to keep my word. Third, Leviticus chapter 10, a brief passage, one to three.

The issue of strange fire of Nadab and Abihu. Fire came down from the presence of the Lord and consumed them. And they died before the Lord.

But a final judgment, obviously. And Henry made reference to Deuteronomy chapter 28, verses 1 to 16. An incredibly beautiful list of blessings, verses 1 to 14.

And then an almost unbelievable list of curses, verses 15 to 68. But the judgments of God in the form of blessings and cursing. I move along to my 13th illustration, Judges, chapters 2 through 16.

I wonder how many of you have acquainted yourself with what is set in front of us in that lengthy passage. Chapter 2 gives the essence of the whole matter. The people began in right relationship with God.

But they sin and do not repent. And so God brings them under judgment. When they can no longer tolerate the judgment any longer, they cry out to God.

And when they cry out to God from the bottom of their hearts with the utmost of sincerity and earnestness, God raises up a judge deliverer. And they're brought back into a relationship with God. And for a season, they walk again with God.

But then that judge dies. And they sin. And the whole pattern is repeated.

Between chapters 3 and 16, there are seven of those full cycle. All of that whole passage, the first half of the book of Judges devoted exclusively to the matter of remedial judgment. I'm asking you, how can we treat it as a matter of small consequence when such a major portion of the Pentateuch is devoted to this urgent subject? That's why I said to you, near 50 years ago, evangelicals believed the whole of the Bible

and earnestly preached and proclaimed it in its entirety.

Now we claim to believe it and earnestly neglect its greatest portion. And we move along again. 1 Samuel, chapter 4, verses 1 to 22.

And in actual fact, chapters 1, 2, and 3 are setting it up for the judgment that is so apparent in chapter 4. You remember Eli and his wicked son and their incredibly gross and evil conduct. And you remember that the ark of God is taken captive. And the messenger comes to Eli, chapter 4, verse 18.

It came about when he mentioned the ark of God that Eli fell off the stool backward beside the gate. And his neck was broken, and he died, for he was old and heavy, grossly overweight. And then a daughter-in-law died in childbirth, verse 21.

And she named the boy as she was dying Ichabod, saying the glory has departed from Israel because the ark of God was taken and because of her father-in-law and her husband. So again, a combination, remedial and final. We come in 1 Samuel, chapter 15, verses 1 to 35, with King Saul and his rejection.

And again, several chapters are involved in the matter. But I read now two verses from chapter 15, verses 28 to 29. And Samuel said to him, the Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to your neighbor, who is better than you.

And also the glory of Israel will not lie or change his mind, for he is not a man that he should change his mind. And so Saul is rejected by God because of his pride. Another remedial judgment.

2 Samuel, chapter 6, verses 1 to 23. The death of Uzziah and the abandonment of the ark. You remember the circumstances.

David set his heart to bring the ark of God taken in the days of Eli back to its rightful place. But like most so-called evangelicals in America today, he consulted the Philistines instead of God. When you want to move the ark, how do you do it? And the Philistines said, why build a new cart and get some young animals and pull it home on the ark? The disregard of the word of God is our greatest error.

God has spoken on every single subject that matters to us. And we disregard chapter after chapter, book after book. And when we want to make the church go, being so silly as to not even recognize God, God abandoned us long ago.

We hire some Madison Avenue publicizer to tell us how to make the church work. And it does work beautifully. Right now, having God in your midst is a hindrance to church growth.

The best thing you can do if you want to grow a church rapidly is to make God a midget like yourself. But in the long run, it's only that which Christ builds that endure. And here we have the tragic situation where because David and the priest and the leaders of Israel carelessly determined to move the ark of God without consulting the word of God, Uzzah was put to death.

And some of you remember how angry David became. And he said, this is now Perez Uzzah. This is the place where the Lord made a breach among us.

And the simple truth is it was David that deserved to die. It was David's great sin that lay behind all this. But instead, God took the life of that poor farm boy who didn't know any better than to reach out and steady the ark when it hit a rough place in the road.

God, in his divine purposes, often spares the real culprit because he has a plan and a purpose for that culprit's life. The fact that you are still here doesn't prove that you're innocent. It only proves that God isn't finished with you.

You better get busy and be the person God has called you to be while time and opportunity are still yours. As I jump to 2 Samuel, chapters 11 and 12, and Psalm 32 and 38 and 51, reference has already been made to this matter, once again involving David. And he himself is spared once more, though he is truly the guilty one.

And it is the child whose life is taken. Or 2 Chronicles, a very extensive passage, really, and involving portions of kings as well. The warning to Solomon, the dedication of the temple, and then, indeed, the awful conduct of Solomon in allowing many wives, and then allowing these wives to turn his heart away from God.

And I mention as number 19, Uzziah, that king of whom we read in 2 Chronicles 26, verse 16, when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly. And he was unfaithful to the Lord his God, for he entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense. And then in verse 19, Uzziah, with a censer in his hand for burning incense, was enraged because the priest rebuked him for his great evil.

And while the priest was standing there in front of him, leprosy broke out on his forehead. One more of this multitude of remedial judgments at the hand of God. While I won't go into detail concerning my 20th reference, Jeremiah, chapters 13, 1 to 19.

I don't remember everything I preached at Cedars, but I sure remember the day I preached on Jeremiah 13. The underwear that was worn, and worn, and worn, and worn, and never washed. And when it was so stinky, not even the prophet himself could get anywhere near it.

He was instructed to go and bury it in the moist soil along the river bank. And then later sent to reclaim it. And all he had was a rotten mask.

You don't bury filthy underwear in moist soil and expect to retrieve clean and wearable garments, do you? And right along with that powerful illustration of the judgment of God, that incredible passage dealing with spiritual drunkenness. If you're not familiar with it, I recommend one of our little pamphlets entitled Spiritual Drunkenness. But a very powerful illustration of the righteous judgments of God.

Finally, illustration 21, the Book of Job, chapters 1 and 2, where we have a twofold judgment from God, an incredible invasion of locusts, and a long draft. I just wanted you to get some sense that this matter of the righteous judgment of God is not minor. I've just touched on a handful.

We could be here the entire day, not less than 12 hours, just giving quick summaries, as I have done of only 21 of these judgments. But now again, the urgent question, do we ourselves know how to act? How to respond to God in the light of his judgments? I want to invite you now to open your Bibles to the Book of Second Chronicles, and in particular, at chapter 15. I believe in his first message, Henry drew verses 1 and 2 of chapter 15 to our attention.

And I'm ever so grateful that he did. One of the things that has meant more to me than I could possibly say is that at these Caesar's conferences, where there has never, ever, to my knowledge, been any agreement or discussion among the speakers as to what we were going to speak about, almost always,

with one single exception that I can remember, we all were saying the same thing, the harmony of the Holy Spirit. And I'm so grateful, because I've been a speaker at a lot of conferences that were almost like preaching contests, and everybody trying to outdo the other one, and none of them saying anything cohesive or that made an overall impact.

But now, as I said, Genesis, or Second Chronicles 15. Let me read a larger portion than Brother Henry read. Starting at verse 1. Now the Spirit of God came upon Azariah, the son of Oded, and he went out to meet Asa.

And he said to him, listen to me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin, for the Lord is with you when you are with him. And if you seek him, he will let you find him. But if you forsake him, he will forsake you.

And for many days, Israel was without the true God and without a teaching priest and without law. But in their distress, they turned to the Lord God of Israel, and they sought him, and he let them find him. And in those times, there was no peace to him who went out or to him who came in, for many disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the land.

And nation was crushed by nation and city by city, for God troubled them with every kind of distress. But you, be strong, and do not lose courage, for there is reward for your work. Let's take a few moments to analyze this passage.

First, to whom these seven verses are addressed. Well, obviously, to Asa, to all of Judah, and to all of Benjamin. Now, let me point out a major problem that we face.

There is no spokesman for God in a position to address the nation. By and large, the men with large audiences, the TV and the radio preachers and so on, they're just toying around with silly stuff. Certainly, a significant issue of prayer is, Lord, raise up, as you did in the days of Asa, a man or an army of men who can proclaim the word of the Lord to the nation.

Has that been a prayer request of yours? I got to watch myself here. I'm knocking down these pictures. Excuse me.

Why not make that an urgent prayer request? To be quite honest, it is one of my most urgent and regular requests. And I take heart when I visit the campuses of some of our schools, and I talk with some of the godly faculty. And they tell me that they are facing now, for the first time in their teaching careers, bodies of urgent, God-seeking young men.

Will you pray? Pray with all your might that God will raise up spokesmen who can speak his word to the nation. But now, in addition to the audience, the message needs to be explored. There are three statements made immediately.

Number one, the Lord is with you when you are with him. Number two, if you seek him, he will let you find him. And number three, if you forsake him, he will forsake you.

Now, we're living at a time when the bulk of the church is absolutely convinced that God will never leave us nor forsake us under any circumstance. We can become as vile as we please. We can be as neglectful of his word as we want.

He can't help himself but be with us. But if he is, it's the first time in history. And you'll certainly not find any accounts in scripture to back up the fact.

And you'll find a whole lot of accounts like this, where the word is very plainly stated. God is with you while you are with him. Now, that's a pretty involved matter.

Our Lord, in John 15, in talking about fruit, said, abide in me and I in you. It's got to come both ways. It's not enough for us to claim God is with us.

We've got to be in him to such a degree that he's willing to be with us. And when we refuse to do things his way, it is one awful, reckless sin to declare he's with us. For he most certainly is not.

And the prophet is very clear. The Lord is with you when you are with him. And certainly, one of the outgrowths of this weekend ought to be every single heart determined to always be with him, never, ever to even allow a single day to creep in when we are not with him.

But the second statement is of such profound consequence. If you seek him, he will let you find him. This word seek is a frequently used term in scripture.

And God wants us to understand you can't just stumble down Broadway and trip over God. God has two dwelling places, the high and the lofty place that none of us can reach on our own, and the heart, the spirit of the broken, and the contrite. We've got to face realistically the limited habitation of God.

He is not among the careless and the reckless. He's not among the prayerless and the foolish. He dwells with those who seek him.

What a wonderful assurance. If you seek him, he will let you find him. But don't fail to see the reverse of that.

If you don't seek him, it is wicked to suppose that he is with you. The seeking of the face of God is a daily pursuit, an hourly pursuit throughout our lives. And we must allow the prophet's warning to grip our hearts.

If you forsake him, he will forsake you. It is my deep, deep conviction that the American church has forsaken the God of the Bible, and thus he has forsaken God. Amazing that you can go for decades without any evidence whatsoever of the presence of God and not even miss it.

We are so much like the Pharisees of the New Testament that it's amazing, and we don't even know it. May God help us to face the realities as they exist. Now, we also have a historical portion in these verses.

And let me draw the statements of this historical portion to your attention. Verse 3, for many days, Israel was without the true God. And tragically, they didn't know, and they didn't care.

And that, of course, is the description of the American church for many days. We have been without the true God. I mentioned to you to begin with my experiences in Portland, Oregon, beginning in 1957.

Those were common in those days. God was with us. When we proclaimed his word faithfully in the power of the Holy Spirit, remarkable things happened.

I've seen entire large congregations bathed in tears as the Spirit of God, working through the Word of God, produced conviction and conversion. Time after time, it's been my joy to see faces suddenly light up, and

afterward, people to rush up and say, I've been radically transformed right during the preaching of the Word of God. But it seldom happens now.

The most earnest beseeching, the most eager begging, and the average congregation listens to the Word and walks out without having even felt a dent. Every evidence says God is not with us as a nation of churches, just as he was not with Israel for many days. Notice the second of these historical statements.

They were without a teaching priest. I pity the multitudes of persons with hungry hearts who go to church Sunday after Sunday after Sunday, longing for a word from the Lord. But they're without a teaching priest.

They just got some silly fellow prancing around in the pulpit, pretending to know something, to say something, and you add up the entirety of the sermon, and all you've got is one giant ought. There's nothing to it. Nothing of substance, nothing that teeth can be sunk into, nothing that grips the heart and transforms the life.

Look at the third. They were without the written law. It's not that the law didn't exist, but the law was not applied to them.

Then we read as well, there was no peace to him who went out or to him who came in. That's the kind of a society we live in. Multitudes of places where I go, the people tell me, we don't dare come to evening meetings.

We can't leave our homes. If we left our home that night, it would surely be ransacked. There are multitudes of places in this land where you don't even dare to venture in the daytime.

It is much too dangerous, especially for a woman to go along. We have become like Israel during this sad period the prophet is describing. He mentions as well that there are disturbances which are afflicting all the inhabitants of the land.

There's not one of us that has not been affected by 9-11. Every one of us is being daily affected by our war against terrorism, as absurd and silly as the prospect is trying to defeat an enemy that God has sent against us. I am of the deeply considered opinion that God has raised up the Muslim religion for such a time as this to show his own people their sin.

Instead, we pretend that with some money and some arms, we can wipe terrorism out of the world. I pity the lunkheads who think that's a possibility. If God were on our side, there is no enemy in all the world that could be raised up that we've had any cause whatsoever to fear.

But when God is against us, what does it matter who's for us? And we read this awesome statement, nation was crushed by nation, city by city, for God. Verse 6, for God troubled them with every kind of distress. The situation that the prophet Azariah, son of Oded, is describing is a situation that appears identical to the situation in which we find ourselves.

If there's any difference, I can't figure out what that difference is. But we read that in their distress, they turned to the Lord God of Israel, and they sought him. And I report, and Henry has reported, and every observant, earnest believer can report the same.

In our distress, we act as if there is no God, or as if the God that we supposedly serve is as happy with the situation and as contented as we are. We're going to have to face the fact that what is happening to us is

happening to us at the hand of God. Let me read again these words from verse 7. God troubled them with every kind of distress.

And when it's God who is troubling us with every kind of distress, our only hope is to return to him. In their distress, they turned to the Lord God of Israel, and they sought him. I took just a moment in going over Judges 2 to 16 to point out to you in those seven cycles, in every instance, it was when they could not bear the judgment any longer.

And they cried out to God, but God raised up a judge deliverer. And in all my travels about the land for these many decades, I rarely am ever in a place where people are crying unto the Lord. In a typical prayer meeting, which is not destroyed by dividing it all up into little pieces, for the life of me, I can't understand why so many of you think that a corporate prayer meeting means you bring a lot of people together in a room and then divide them all up into little huddles.

I can't track with you folk. There's just something mystical about what you're doing that defies my ability to comprehend. I believe with all my heart that we ought to spend hours in these cedar conferences crying unto the Lord as a people.

But indeed, if we had a time of prayer like that, I can tell you what will happen. Some of you would speak in such low voices that the rest of us would get discouraged and leave. We don't know how to cry unto the Lord.

I mean, when you're crying, can anybody hear you? Well, of course. And these people, in their distraught, cried unto the Lord. And the Lord let them find him.

And the word of encouragement is spoken in verse 7. But you, Asa, Benjamin, Judah, you be strong. And do not lose courage, for there is reward for your work. I don't think that I've ever engaged in any work anywhere near as difficult as prayer.

For many years, it was my joyful privilege to lead an early morning prayer meeting in my own office in Wheaton. And there was not one single week that was an exception to this. Every Friday night for all those years, I was more tired on Friday night than any other day of the week.

You meet together with a group of earnest people who are crying unto God. And it drains all the strength you have. But oh, take courage.

God is awaiting the cry of his people. Before we leave at this juncture, let us do two things. Let us set our heart to cry unto the Lord, each one without exception.

Some of you might honestly say, I don't really know how to pray. Well, thank God it isn't too late. What a wonderful time to set your heart.

Lord, I don't even know quite all what it means to seek your face. But I want you to know, from now on, you're not going to get any rest day or night, because I'm going to be after you. I'm going to be in your face.

I'm going to be hounding you. I'm going to let the distress of my soul be constantly manifested. I set my heart to seek your face.

And when your own heart is that, why don't you become an annoyance to others everywhere you go? I want everybody that I touch to know that God is waiting for the cry of his people for their distress. Will you set yourself to become an agent that the Spirit of God uses to turn multitudes to that path of crying unto God for their distress? You say, I'm not anybody. Well, neither am I. You say, I'm all.

Some seem to think I am also. I feel it in my bones. It's hard to keep quiet.

But we have yet a nation to be saved that will only be saved if we cry unto God. And if there's a chance that I might yet arouse one more to cry unto the Lord, I must do it. And so must you.

So set your heart to seek his face from now on and determine to bring everyone with you on the same course who you can possibly affect for good. Forgive us our love of Eve, our willingness to accept an awful situation and try to live with it. Forgive us for our prayerlessness.

Forgive us for our prayers that are without strong cries and tears. Turn us into a people who give you no rest day or night until righteousness reigns in the land. For the glory of King Jesus.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/13/SID13801.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/richard-owen-roberts/change-our-hearts-part-4/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net