

Seeking Gods Face

by Richard Owen Roberts

Richard Owen Roberts emphasizes the urgent need for believers to seek God's face and understand His character to experience true revival and restoration in the church.

Duration: 1:18:56

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 14:11, 2 Chronicles 15:12-15, 2 Chronicles 16:9, Isaiah 55:6-7, Joel 1:14-15, Joel 2:12-13, 1 Thessalonians 2:13

Topics: "Seeking God", "Spiritual Revival"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking God's face in times of trouble and spiritual decline. It recounts stories of individuals and communities who experienced revival and restoration by earnestly seeking God through solemn assemblies and covenants. The message highlights the need for churches to prioritize seeking God's presence and guidance, even in the face of opposition and challenges, as God promises to support those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.

Transcript

I'm sure it has often struck you, as it has me, how God uses most unusual, strange, even oddball circumstances and statements to accomplish his will and his purpose. A number of years ago, we started a church in the state of California. It was a church along historic congregational lines, and a church that required credible evidence of regeneration for membership.

And that was determined on the basis of persons making a public statement before all the rest of the fellowship, and then that being carefully witnessed, weighed, evaluated. Had a goodly number who were prepared to do this, but we were doing this over a series of four Sunday nights. On the fourth Sunday of this process, a woman went out the door, and I said to her, is it your intention to become a charter member of this fellowship? And in tears, she said to me, you know perfectly well, I can't.

I've never been born again. Yes, I said, I know that. But what I don't know is why.

Oh, she said, it would be impossible for me. Impossible? Why? She said, I don't feel what you have to feel to be a Christian. I said, what is that? Oh, she said, you know my husband.

I don't feel what he feels. I said, would you mind answering a couple of questions? Yes. I said, does your husband feel about you the way you feel about him? Well, she said, he's a good man, and I know in his own way he loves me.

But I know he doesn't love me the way I love him. I said, tell me, did you ever make an onion sandwich? Now, can you imagine such a stupid statement? Did you ever make an onion sandwich? Oh, she said, I love onion sandwiches, but Eddie likes them. So every once in a while, I make him an onion sandwich.

So I said, you don't feel about Eddie the way Eddie feels about you, and you don't feel about onion sandwiches the way Eddie feels about onion sandwiches. Now, why do you think that your difference in feeling about Christ bars you from being a Christian? Oh, she said, I just am sure it does. I said, would you tell me, do you ever feel grieved because you are a wretched sinner? Oh, she said, so much so I can't even sing the hymns.

I feel terrible. I said, did you ever feel that Christ truly loves you in a great way? She said, I know he does, but I don't understand why. And I said to her, Betty, you have all the feelings that are necessary to be a Christian.

That evening when the meeting was open, she came racing down the aisle and said, I have got to tell you what God did for me this afternoon. You never know what God is going to use. We have so many thrilling stories in the records of revival accounts that sometimes are just simply astonishing.

There was a young man who was a rector in the Church of Wales, Southern Wales, an ungodly reprobate of a man, a carouser, a very heavy drinker, wasted most of his time in all kinds of activities that were certainly not considered appropriate for men in ministry. But he heard about a neighbor, an independent church, a man by the name of Philip Hugh, who was preaching to an ever enlarging congregation. And he felt a real sense of jealousy.

Why would this ridiculous nonconformist be drawing a greater crowd than myself? So he disguised himself and went to listen to Philip Hugh preach. And he discovered Philip Hugh was preaching on the law of God. And he thought, well, I can do that.

So he began preaching on the law of God. He had people weeping in the congregation, people coming to him and asking him what they had to do. He hadn't the faintest idea.

He put on his disguise again. And he went back to listen to the nonconformist. And this time the nonconformist was preaching on the grace of God.

He went back to his Anglican church and began preaching on the grace of God. And the crowd just began to multiply. And vast numbers of persons were profoundly converted.

Then a man who was the founder of the Welch circulating charity schools. You see, the bulk of the Welch population at that time was illiterate. And this man had started a charity school system in which he had volunteers teaching the rest of the people how to read.

Tens of thousands of people had learned to read. Over the preceding several months, his name was Griffith Jones. He came into that area.

He was also a rector of an Anglican church, but spent a great deal of his energy in this movement teaching people to read. Came into that area. And the subject of my story, Daniel Rowland, went to listen to him.

The crowd was so vast, the service was in a field. And in the midst of his sermon, Griffith Rowland suddenly stopped. And he stared at this arrogant clergyman, Daniel Rowland.

Then he bowed his head and he prayed, Lord, smite this arrogant rector. And the man went home in incredible consternation and confusion. And within a few hours, was profoundly converted.

And soon, he had 10,000 people in this little rural village coming to listen to the gospel. People left work Saturday late in the afternoon, walked all night to be on the grounds for Sunday morning, stayed all day for the preaching of the word, and then started out late Sunday walking again all night to be home in order to be at work on Monday. That was the beginnings of that great revival in Wales that resulted in the establishment of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church.

Hundreds of thousands of people profoundly converted. And the Lord used strange, different, extraordinary ways. We have no idea what God will use or who he will use.

We just know that God can do it. And I believe he's ready to do it. When he's got the people who cannot live without him, who have committed themselves to truly seek his faith.

I'm sure that many of you have come to the same conclusion that I have. We are in the incredibly awful mess we're in. Because the church has lost sight of the truth and is proclaiming a message that is so full of ridiculous nonsense that the angels of hell must be constantly rejoicing and blowing their trumpets and enjoying the incredible mess that has been created in the Christian world by the nonsense being proclaimed.

I don't dare speak specifically of Canada, but I know a great deal about the United States. And the evidence is overwhelming that at least 70% of all people who call themselves born again have never, ever come anywhere near the Lord Jesus Christ. There is an incredible problem with the teaching and preaching of the church on the doctrine of salvation.

But I have discovered, and I trust you have too, that you never solve a problem by going after the fruit. All problems must be resolved at the root level. Often, people approach me and ask me to get involved in some anti-abortion movement.

I refuse. Recently, a significant group in the southern portion of the United States determined to conduct an anti-masonry crusade in the churches across the South and asked me to join them. And I absolutely refused.

And of course, they were unhappy and asked me why. And I said to them, you're aiming at the fruit, not the root. Nothing is solved by cutting off bad fruit.

If you got bad roots, bad fruit continues to appear. Well, what do you mean? I said, I have known a considerable number of men who were absolutely committed to the Masonic lodge, who, when converted to Jesus Christ, didn't have a minute to waste on the lodge. You're not going to do any good speaking out against the lodge.

Instead, speak out in favor of Christ. Let the world know who Christ is and what Christ came to accomplish. And the same can be said of abortion and a multitude of other things that we can fuss around with.

I'm not putting a seal of approval on abortion. I'm only saying you don't get rid of that problem among unconverted people. When a person's heart is right with God, they would not, for one moment, entertain the notion of an abortion.

We've got to be sure we have the arrangement of truth correct. This seems so apparent to me. If I have a wrong view of God, I will have a wrong view of myself.

And with a wrong view of God and myself, I will have a wrong view of sin. And with a wrong view of God, self, and sin, I end up with a ridiculous notion of what salvation is. So if I want to correct the problem of salvation, I'm going to have to go right to the key issue of God.

I don't believe that the bulk of people in our churches or the vast majority of the leadership has any adequate knowledge of God. It appears to me that the foremost task in front of all of us is to get a biblical view of God. I mentioned yesterday the incredible movement of the Holy Spirit in the late 1790s and early part of the next century as a result in part of the preaching of Timothy Dwight in the chapel at Yale College, when month after month after month, he held the God of the Bible before the students.

Even when we're talking about the urgency of prayer and thinking in terms of getting the whole church involved in the prayer life of the church, we're making a dreadful mistake if we're thinking about getting them asking petitions from God. We need to get the church involved in seeking God's face. That's the great need of the hour, committing ourselves to spending earnest, serious time discovering for ourselves the God of the Bible.

Often, people respond to statements of this sort and ask for some counsel or advice on how to go about it. And so many times, I have suggested to people, get a new Bible, one that isn't marked up, one that you don't feel familiar with. And in a careful but fast read, mark every passage where God makes a revelation of himself.

A simple way for folk without a lot of training is simply to put a nice circle around every use of the word I, where God himself is speaking. And then, in some fashion, to separate those circled passages into those passages where God is speaking about something he has done, and in those passages where God is unfolding his character and his heart. It is amazing what the impact of a careful, planned program of meditation on God's self-revelatory statements will do for you.

Our great task is to seek God. Now, we have a lot of profane people in the church, and a lot of people whose mouths run much faster than their brains, and who have no relationship within them of brain and heart. So they make the most absurd and stupid statements.

And very often, people have said to me, when I've urged them to seek God, well, why should we seek God? I didn't know he was lost. They obviously don't understand. This particular verse has been quoted here this week.

I dwell in the high and lofty place. We don't dwell there. We don't find God by tripping over him on Main Street.

We don't even find him, by and large, in the church, because the God of the Bible is not in the average church. You wouldn't learn enough about God in a typical church in the course of an entire year to even save a flea, let alone a human being. We have to seek God.

He dwells in the high and lofty. We dwell in this crime, sin-infested world. We are contaminated every day by the things around us that are anti-God.

If we're going to know him, we're going to have to seek him. And the happy thing is that he has pledged, if you seek me with your whole heart, I will let you find me. I believe the greatest task of ministry today is to help people to seek God's faith.

We might get them aroused for a while, at least, to seek his hand. But the task is to seek his faith. Now, with that in mind, I'd like to ask us to turn to one of those passages of scripture that is obviously at the very heart of God in terms of seeking him.

I expect for a number of you, at least perhaps for the majority, this will be a very familiar passage. Some of you may very well have spoken upon it from at least time to time. I refer to 2 Chronicles, and I draw your attention specifically to the passage beginning with chapter 14.

2 Chronicles chapter 14, let us pick up the reading at verse 1. So Abijah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David. And his son Asa became king in his place. The land was undisturbed for 10 years during his days.

And Asa did good and right in the sight of the Lord his God. He removed the foreign altars, and the high places, tore down the sacred pillars, cut down the Asherim, commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers and to observe the law and the commandments. He also removed the high places and the incense altars from the cities of Judah.

And the kingdom was undisturbed under him. I want to break in on the reading and ask you to observe the words of verse 4. He commanded Judah to seek the Lord. He was in a position to do that.

Part of the problem that we are confronted with today is men who are called of God to command the people of God to seek God's face don't have the authority to command people to do anything. I dare to suppose that every single week, some pastor is thrown out of his church for commanding people. I have no doubt it was God's plan that the men that he appointed as his ministers should be men of authority who, when they commanded a congregation to do what God required, the people felt compelled to respond.

I know that one of the things that has changed in our society is the authority of men in ministry. It grieves me to acknowledge that even as a boy preacher, I had more authority granted by the church than is granted to me today. We have become an independent thinking people.

We don't believe anybody has the right to tell us what to do. But what concerns me is I believe we have undermined ourselves. I believe there has been such an earnest desire on the part of ministry to be accepted by the people and to be regarded merely as one of them that we have destroyed our ability to stand in the place of God and command the people to seek God's face.

I believe part of what is needed today is not only revival, though I believe earnestly in that need. I believe that reformation is needed. We need to reform our ways.

I'm not one of the boys. Not for one moment do I consider myself equal to all others in the areas of authority. I'm not any better than anybody, but I occupy a position of authority.

Not one I appointed myself to, but one God called me to. And I want to stand as an authority figure and say to the people, seek God's face. And I want them to know that they have no option, that what I have said is what God himself is commanding them.

That means we're going to have to change our lifestyle. We're going to have to change our own view of ourselves, even, and of our call from God. I don't want to make any more to do of it.

I simply point that out and ask if indeed you do not see how urgent it is when you stand to speak to be able to speak for God and for the people to respond to you as they responded to Paul. Remember in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, Paul was commending the Thessalonians. And he said to them, you heard me not merely as a man, but as God speaking to you.

And I must add to what I have said that the authority of which I am speaking is not the authority of a proud man, but the authority of a holy man of God. It is the call of God upon each of his servants to walk in such holiness that when a command is issued, the people are afraid to disobey. We don't see much by way of example of that.

But my dear wife Maggie and I, over a period of approximately 20 years, were invited every Labor Day weekend to a conference in the Dallas, Texas area. A revival conference sponsored by the huge Texas Baptist NEMS movement. I'm a Congregationalist.

It's always struck me as amazing that Southern Baptists invite me, but they do. But one of the profound benefits that came to Maggie and myself was that there was this leader of the Texas Baptist men who nobody either dared or wanted to defy. They had such confidence in his walk with God that they were saying to themselves, we've got to stay as close as we can to this man because this man is walking with God.

And if we're with him, we know we're where God wants us. The kind of authority that's needed in the church today is not that of the dictator who bosses people around, but that of the man of God who has been so captured by the heart of God and walks in such proximity to the Lord Jesus Christ that the people want to stay as close to him as they can for the benefit of their own eternal souls. How about taking that seriously and determining to be that person who people automatically follow? Now what made that lesson so impressive to Maggie and myself was Southern Baptists have a rule that anybody who's paid by the convention has to retire at a certain age.

That's not true of pastors, but anybody who's an employee of the convention has to retire at a certain age. This man reached that age and was forced to retire. They then got another man to take his place, another man who had the attitude of a lot of pastors I know.

He had a long whip. He issued an order and snapped the whip. And the movement that had been powerful and greatly used to God suddenly turned downward and almost came to extinction in a three-year period by a man with a military approach to leadership.

And thank God that man left, and a fellow sort of somewhat in between the two came on the scene and at least held it together. But I want to speak ever so strongly again about walking with God so closely that people do not want to run the risk of not staying close to you. I believe that is a very realistic thing.

Most of the people I talk to want to be closer to Christ, and they simply don't know how. Everything is so blurred and messed up. But when a godly man comes on the scene who is absolutely consistent in his walk with Christ, the people long to follow.

Well, that's not my theme, but it is an urgent matter, and I'm grateful for the chance to press it hard on you. Verse 6, he built fortified cities in Judah. Since the land was undisturbed and there was no one at war with

him during those years, because the Lord had given him rest.

For he said to Judah, let us build these cities and surround them with walls and towers and gates and bars. The land is still our, because we have sought the Lord our God. We have sought him, and he has given us rest on every side.

So they built and prospered. You would not dare to stand and speak those words. If you did, you'd be laughed out of the room.

The land is not still our. We lost the land. We lost it in the lifetime of the older folk who are here.

We lost it for the very reason Asa said they still had it. They sought the Lord, and he let them find him, and God himself preserved the land. We haven't sought the Lord, and we have lost the land.

That's the obvious question that needs to be asked. Can it be gotten back? My understanding is we are on the verge of destruction, but God does not destroy a people without first having had a prophet proclaim to them their impending destruction. Now, I know that someone could argue that the truth of God is available in the scripture and on the internet, but I believe that it can be gotten back because God has not raised up a spokesman for himself who has declared to the nations that it's too late.

For myself, I am going to go on believing that the land can be reclaimed until that time when God himself says otherwise. I find it an incredible tragedy that the men who seem to have the ear of the nation do not seem to have the heart of God. We have some wonderful men who preach from the Bible and say things that are accurate, but I believe God himself, just before he destroys us, will send a prophet saying, you had your opportunity, and it is now too late.

And he certainly has not done that. And as I said for myself, I'm going to go on believing that the land can be reclaimed. Not by us, but by God himself, answering our heartfelt cry for him to come again among us, our heartfelt yearning to seek his face.

But all of us know that we do not have an indefinite length of time in which to do this. We don't know the time limit. I made reference to the passage in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2. I wonder if you have ever given consideration.

I'm going to just take a moment to turn there so as not to run the risk of misquoting. Will you join me? Turn to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. I believe that this is an incredibly important passage, and it's a passage that appropriately responds to Charles' inquiry. 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. Let me pick up the reading at verse 9. For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day, so as not to burden any of you, we proclaim to you the gospel of God.

You are witnesses, and so is God. How devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behave toward you, believers. Just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each of you as a father would his own children, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

And for this reason also, we constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. For you, brethren, became imitators of the church of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your countrymen, even

as they did from the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out.

They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved with the result. Now get this. With the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins, but wrath has come upon them to the utmost.

How many of you have carefully weighed that last verse? Have you ever given any consideration at all to the measure of sin? Do you realize that God himself has allotted a measure of sin to every entity? And when that measure of sin is full, that entity is under the wrath of God to the utmost. Maybe someone doesn't even know what the word entity means. I've said God grants every entity a measure of sin.

When a man and a woman marry, we describe them as a couple. That's an entity. When God blesses that couple with children, we then have a bigger term that we often apply, a family.

That's an entity. We have the extended family that includes the wider circle. A church is an entity.

A ministry like Canadian Revival Fellowship is an entity. A state or a province is an entity, an educational institution. God has granted to every entity a measure of sin.

When that measure is full, that entity is under the wrath of God to the utmost. Now, what is meant by measure of sin? Well, just think in terms of a bushel basket, just to help us here. As a boy, I worked on a truck farm, picked all kinds of row crops.

When we were picking strawberry, there was the final strawberry that we put into the box. And it was accepted then as full by the farmer, a bushel basket. You can fill it and call it full.

You can keep on and on until the beans are falling out. But there is a measure granted by God of sin. A powerful, profound illustration of this is in what happened after the second cleansing of the temple.

You remember full well. Christ went out and mounted the hill that overlooked the temple site. And he said, your house is left unto you desolate.

We do not know exactly what year Christ was born. Therefore, we do not know what year exactly those words were spoken. But just to simplify the matter, we'll say he was born in that time between BC and AD 0. And that these words were spoken in the last year of his ministry.

So we'll pretend that when he was at the age of 33 and a half, he said, your house is left unto you desolate. We don't know, as I said, how close to that date those words appear. But what was meant, your house is left unto you desolate.

He had just said before that, my house, my Father's house, a house of prayer for all the nations. Now, it's your house, desolate. I'm not coming back.

I've left. I'm gone for good. I no longer have any contact or connection at all.

This is now your house. You go on playing religion as long as you please. Until that appointed hour that he had already told them was coming, when there would not be left one single stone standing upon another.

We do know as a fact that that happened in the year 70. And therefore, we conjecture that 36 and a half years went by in which nothing changed in the temple in Jerusalem except God was never there. Is there

any hope, asked our brother.

Can things be reclaimed? Not if the measure of sin is full. Because once the measure of sin is full, that entity is under the wrath of God to the utmost. But have we any evidence that the measure is full? None that I know of.

We have been adding to the measure with regularity for a long time. We have had no national repentance for a very long season. But insofar as we know, there's still room in the measure.

And as long as the measure is not full, there's hope. And as I said already, I believe before the last sin is cast into the measure, a warning will come from God. So I believe with all my heart that as late as it is, it is not too late.

And if I may add this simple but very precious fact, when you're talking about revival, one of the most wonderful words that must never be lost sight of is the word suddenly. Have you got that? The word suddenly. Everything looked black.

Everything looked hopeless. And then suddenly, the Lord came. I gave you the brief account of Daniel Rowland, made mention of Griffith Jones and the Welsh circulating charity school.

Isn't it incredible that a man gets a burden to teach the people of Wales how to read? Just prior to that time, when the Bible is translated into the Welsh language and the spirit of God is outpoured upon the nation, and suddenly, thousands upon thousands of people who have a hunger for the word of God now know how to read it. And God has seen to it that it's been translated into their own language. The providences of God in revival are wonderfully encouraging.

As black as things now look, suddenly, God can be among us. And everything can be marvelously transformed. And unless God says otherwise, I'm going to go on believing.

It's not too late. Verse 8 of chapter 14 of 2 Chronicles. Now Asa had an army of 300,000 from Judah, bearing large shields and spears, and 280,000 from Benjamin, bearing shields and wielding bows.

All of them valiant warriors, so 580,000 men. What would appear to me to be a sizable army. But, verse 9, Zerah, the Ethiopian, came out against them with an army of a million men and 300 chariots.

And he came to Mereshah. So Asa went out to meet him. And they drew up in battle formation in the valley of Zephthah at Mereshah.

Then Asa called to the Lord his God. And he said, Lord, there is no one besides thee to help in the battle between the powerful and those who have no strength. Now obviously, as large as the number 580,000 prepared men sounds, it's nothing when you're coming up against an army of one million.

Now there was a time in this country when we were faced with proportions somewhat like that. But not today. If we could say that the army of Satan that's coming against us consists of 500 million, we're hard pressed to say confidentially, we've got 10,000.

We may. But I've come to realize how few people you can really count on. When it comes right down to it, people who say they're with you suddenly disappear.

And you don't know how many you have. But one thing is absolute. We can say with Asa, there is no one besides thee to help in the battle between the powerful and those who have no strength.

So help us, O Lord, our God, for we trust in thee. And in thy name have come against this multitude. O Lord, thou art our God.

Let not man prevail against us. So the Lord routed the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah. And the Ethiopians fled.

And Asa and the people who were with him pursued them as far as there are. And so many Ethiopians fell that they could not recover, for they were shattered before the Lord and before his army. And they carried away very much plunder.

They destroyed all the cities around Jerar, for the dread of the Lord had fallen on them. And they despoiled all the cities, for there was much plunder in them. They also struck down those who owned livestock.

And they carried away large numbers of sheep and camels. Then they returned to Jerusalem. Now the Spirit of God came on 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. The Lord is with you when you are with him.

Now it's already clear what that means. The land is still ours, because we sought him. We have lost the land, because we have failed to seek him.

If you seek him, verse 1 or verse 2, he will let you find him. If you forsake him, he will forsake you. I believe with all my heart that the churches of North America have forsaken the land.

You'd be hard-pressed to name five churches in both of our countries who truly seek God's face. Verse 3, 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. We had one bright period in the last 40 years when those planes flew into the trade center and into the Pentagon. And that plane crashed in the fields of Pennsylvania.

There was an incredible flurry of turning back to God. It was amazing. Everywhere you looked, there were signs out, God bless America, and all kinds of things like that.

But how long did that last? Maybe three weeks, if you stretch it. And then we plummeted deeper into our rebellion and sin. We do not know how, as a pair of nations, to seek God's face.

Brother, if I may be so bold as to say so, I believe the overwhelming task of Canadian Revival Fellowship is to teach people how to seek God, and to teach it in such a way that people know that is their only hope. And thank God it's not too late. If I may interject this personal conviction, the youth are hungry.

In all their rebellion and foolishness, they're hungry. The aged remember at least something of the way it used to be. Countless times when I have preached here and there, large numbers of aged people have come up to me with tears on their faces saying, oh, I haven't heard preaching like that.

And they'll say 50 years, 40 years, 60 years. They're longing once again for those days when the word of God comes with great power and authority. Our problem is in that group somewhere between, say, 35 and 65 who are sold out to materialism, who are so beset with the desire for wealth and luxury and pleasure that they scarcely even know that there is such a thing as eternity.

We've got to be wise and aim the message at those who are ready to hear it. Canadian Revival Fellowship ought to give itself unceasingly to the profound preaching of the word of God to the young people of the land. That's where great hope lies.

Let the elderly know what you're doing, and their hearts will leap with joy. But not much is going to happen among them. Some of them can be rekindled, praise God.

But the great hope is the youth. In those times, verse 5, there was no peace to him who went out or to him who came in. For many disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the lands.

A nation was crushed by nation and city by city, for God troubled them with every kind of distress. But you, be strong. Do not lose courage, for there is a reward for your work.

Brother, be strong. Don't lose courage. There is a reward for the work.

Every one of us should embrace that glorious truth and believe with all of our hearts that until God says it's too late, it's not too late. Now, when Asa heard these words and the prophecy which Azariah, the son of Oded, the prophet, spoke, he took courage and he removed the abominable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities which he had captured in the hill country of Ephraim. He then restored the altar of the Lord, which was in front of the porch.

Some of you who were here yesterday, remember my pointing out the four things that precede revival. Terrible moral, spiritual decline. Number two, righteous judgment from God.

Number three, God himself raising up somebody or somebodies with an incredible hunger for God and the outpouring of his spirit. Number four, which I did not enlarge upon, some extraordinary action on the part of the people. That's what we've got in front of us here.

An extraordinary action on the part of the people. Verse nine, he gathered all Judah and Benjamin and those from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon who resided with them. For many detected to him from Israel when they saw that the Lord his God was with him.

So they assembled at Jerusalem in the third month of the 15th year of Asa's reign. It is time to call a solemn assembly. Bring all of the people together.

The instructions in Joel 1 and 2 are more than adequate. They tell us plainly what must be done and how to do it. Everybody is to be summoned to the solemn assembly, even the mother with a newborn baby at her breast is required to be present.

The honeymoon couple has their honeymoon revoked and God demands their presence. The priests and the ministers weep between the porch and altar. Everybody sets their heart to seek the face of God.

I'm able to testify from firsthand knowledge how God does respond. A number of years ago, preaching in a conference in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, a pastor said to a friend of mine, he and I were sharing the preaching in this conference, a Welshman. He said to us, I want to take you for a drive in the

mountains.

Now I have found through the years that very few pastors have time to waste taking visitors for rides in the mountains. I'm not saying it couldn't happen, but when somebody tells me that's the purpose, I say to myself, there's a deeper purpose than that. So we got in his car.

We had not even gotten out of town before he said to us something dreadful has occurred. The leadership of the church has agreed with me as to how we're going to handle this awful situation, but it was agreed among us that we wouldn't act until we sought your counsel. All right, pastor, what has happened? He said we discovered that there were four people in the church who were creating trouble, whisperers, grumblers, stirring stuff up.

He said we found that that was the same group of four people who had managed to get my predecessor put out and his predecessor put out, and they were now working tooth and nail to put me out of the ministry of this church. So we called the deacon's meeting, and we agreed that what we would do would be place these four people under church discipline. Our constitution required us to give a two-week notice, and we gave the notice, and we put the people out.

They turned around and sued the church, saying that the four of them who had been excommunicated were the true First Baptist Church, Bogosa Springs, Colorado, that the others were interlopers, and demanding that the church bank accounts, the church property, the hymnals, the Bibles, everything come to the four of them. They had 11 friends who left the church when they were put out. And he said this is the decision we have made.

At the end of this conference, we're going to walk out as a congregation and let them have the whole thing. We're not going to go to court. And I was asked by the deacons to get your approval.

I said you will never get approval for that kind of wickedness from me. What do you mean? I said tell me, how do you feel about the people that you put out? Oh good, it's wonderful to be rid of those troublemakers. And I said to him, church discipline was not provided by God to relieve yourself of a troublemaker, but to bring sinners to repentance.

How long did it take you to get rid of them? Oh, he said just the two weeks I mentioned. I said you have only one option. That is to call a solemn assembly.

Send a registered letter requesting the presence of the four that you had communicated and the others who left with them. And confess to them that you misused church discipline. You mean we have to take them back into membership? Why of course.

He said I've never even heard of a solemn assembly. And I said well your ignorance is your problem. But that is the only recourse you have.

Well he didn't like it. My friend was in the back seat. He turned to him.

He said, Grant, what do you think? He said I'll tell you what I think, pastor. I think I don't know what Mr. Roberts is talking about, but he does. And you better listen to him.

I mean I'm giving you exactly what occurred. He made it clear I don't like it. But we committed ourselves to do what you men said we should.

Now you'll have to help us. I said all the help I can possibly give, I will gladly give. I said don't do it in a hurry.

Allow at least three months for very careful preparation. In the meantime, between the conversation and the solemn assembly, two more lawsuits were filed. One for damages.

Four million dollars apiece for each of the four people excommunicated from the church. Sixteen million. And an additional million from the pastor and his wife.

They'd have been lucky to get \$35 out of him. But they stuck by the commitment they made. And they prepared with great earnestness for the solemn assembly.

Followed all of the instructions as precisely as they could. Not one of the 15 who left came. But God did.

And after a whole week of fasting and prayer, each family, as they were capable in their own household, they came together early on the Saturday to seek God's intervention and grace. And while the others did not come, God did. And they left late that day with the assurance that God had intervened.

Three days after the solemn assembly, the four persons who had filed the lawsuits were riding in a private airplane that crashed. And their lives were snuffed out. The lawsuits were set aside and the church entered into a wonderful season of true revival.

Doing things God's way brings God's reward. Let's notice the details that are here. Verse 10.

They assembled at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of Asa's reign. They sacrificed to the Lord that day 700 oxen, 7,000 sheep from the spoil they had brought. They entered into the covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and soul.

And whoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel should be put to death, whether small or great, man or woman. I don't think it's necessary to go that far. I don't think in fact we could or should.

But at least we've got to see how serious this is. I don't believe it may be going too far to say to people if you are unwilling to join us in seeking God's face, you don't really belong here. Go find yourself a church that does things your way instead of God's way.

I'm not telling you to do that. I'm simply saying this is obviously an issue of the greatest possible consequence. A covenant must be entered into.

Every pastor should set his heart to lead his people into a covenant to perpetually seek God's face and launch that seeking in some form of a solemn assembly. Moreover, they made an oath to the Lord with a loud voice, with shouting, with trumpets and with horns. And all Judah rejoiced concerning the oath, for they had sworn with their whole heart and had sought him earnestly, and he let them find him.

So the Lord gave them rest on every side. I repeat what I've said already. I do not believe it's too late.

But I don't think we have an endless amount of time to obey the Lord. I believe the hour of urgency is upon us. And we must commit ourselves to do things God's way.

When you call a solemn assembly, I can assure you there'll be protest. There'll be people who say, we've never done that before. Or other silly remarks.

For obeying God always brings blessing. Every church that I have known that has truly entered in to the spirit of seeking God in a covenant fashion, beginning with a solemn assembly, has enjoyed the blessing and the benefit of obedience. And it is my profound conviction, just as it says in the next chapter.

I'll not go into the next chapter. It's a disappointing chapter. You could almost wish it hadn't been included.

Because Asa, who had done so well up until the end of this solemn assembly, as you remember, got diseased in his feet. And instead of seeking the Lord, he sought the physicians. But I do want to close with these words in verse 9 of chapter 16.

The eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth, that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on, you will surely have war.

What an awful way for a man who saw the hand of God move so mindfully to end his life. But nonetheless, the promise stands. God's eyes, even now, are passing to and fro across the whole earth looking for that man whose heart is completely His.

For He desires to make that man strong and a mighty blessing. Why should not each of us lay hold of the offer of God and be the instruments, among others, that God uses to transform our country?

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/EPGInJ0ZcTc.mp4>

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