

Acts 3: 17-26; “Times of Refreshing at the Reformation”, Sermon # 17
in the series – “Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by
Pastor Paul Rendall on October 30th, 2011,
in the Morning Worship Service.

I would like to speak to you this morning about this phrase- “The times of refreshing” which Peter says “may come from the presence of the Lord.” The 1912 Weymouth Translation says, “that there may come seasons of revival from the Lord.” The Revised Standard Version says, “so that there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.” What are these times of refreshing? Well, I believe that these times of refreshing are not speaking of the whole time of the New Testament Church Age; for when this sermon was preached, Peter was already in New Testament times. Rather, it appears from the simple reading of the text itself, it is speaking of seasons of revival and refreshing which would come, if these particular men repented and were converted to Jesus Christ. These particular men are called, here in Peter’s sermon, “the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with their fathers.” They were representatives of the whole nation of the Jews who were the inheritors of the promises made to Abraham; that in their seed all the families of the earth should be blessed. The promised “Seed” is Jesus Christ our Lord. Peter is saying that the gospel was to be preached to the Jews first”, God having raised up His Servant Jesus; He sent Him to bless them “in turning them from their iniquities”. The “times of refreshing” therefore, to which Peter is referring, are not exclusively referring to the refreshing times which will come to individual believers who repent and place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. (Although it is true that they will come, in a measure, to those who repent of their sins and put their trust in Christ.) They are referring to those times of revival and refreshing which the Holy Spirit will eventually bring to greater numbers of people together; people who will come to know God’s blessing them in order to be able to see the greater advances of Christ’s kingdom as a result of His pouring out the Spirit upon them. He is speaking of times of great revival.

This is the subject which I would like to bring to your attention today. I would like to proceed in this way. First, we will look at repentance and conversion in relation to these “times of refreshing”. 2ndly, we will look at Christ’s coming (the times of restoration) in relation to these times of refreshing. And 3rdly – We will look at the central role which the Jews will have in regard to world-wide times of refreshing. This sermon is important for the days in which we live. We are not living in times when the gospel is advancing in the Western World; in Europe and the in United States of America. The gospel is advancing in China and in other places in the Far East. It may be advancing in the hearts of many believers in a slow general sense world-wide; but it is not generally advancing among the nations of the world. It is rather crawling. I hope that by means of this sermon, that we will look together this morning at these glorious times and truths, and that we will begin to pray in a

greater way for the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit so that the Church might advance.

1st – Let us consider repentance and conversion in relation to these “times of refreshing.” (Verses 17-19)

Here in these verses Peter is specifically preaching to, and referring to, the Jews. But the principle of God's coming to revive His people by means of His Spirit being poured out in greater measure to the accomplishment of greater things being done for Christ's kingdom and His glory; this is also applicable to “the times the Gentiles” which we currently are living in. I will speak more about this later in the sermon, but for right now, I would like to assert to you that there have been at certain times in the history of the Church; times of refreshing; times of revival. The Reformation, which we are remembering this morning, was one of those “times of refreshing”. The Reformation was actually a great and long lasting Revival which began decisively on October 31st, 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of Wittenberg chapel. He was protesting the Pope's sale of indulgences to the ignorant people of the church who thought that they were buying their relatives out of Purgatory. Roman Catholicism teaches that there is a place outside of heaven which is not hell, in which the souls of some people must go to be purified if they are to enter heaven. In other words, Rome teaches that there are still some sins in a person's life which Christ's sacrifice on the cross did not blot out for them; sins which these people then supposedly have to pay for by staying in this place until someone can merit their coming out. But listen to what the Bible clearly teaches. Titus chapter 2, verse 11 says, “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.” There is nothing about Purgatory here. Those believing in Christ are redeemed from every lawless deed. They are purified by our God and Christ Himself, and they are not purified or released from a place which does not exist, by any letters of indulgence from a Pope.

Looking on-line at a Roman Catholic definition of Purgatory, I found this: The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines purgatory as a “purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven,” which is experienced by those “who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified” (CCC 1030). It notes that “this final purification of the elect . . . is entirely different from the punishment of the damned” (CCC 1031). But the Tridentine Creed, the Profession of Faith of the Council of Trent, authorized by the Pope, in Session 6, Chapter 30 says: “ If any one shall say that after the grace of justification received, the offence is so forgiven to every penitent sinner, and guilt of eternal punishment so removed, that there remains no guilt of temporal punishment to be suffered, either in this life, or the life to come in purgatory, let him be accursed.” What fear this struck in the hearts of those ignorant of the teaching of the Bible. Christ has not

accomplished a full and free redemption and is not applying it completely to those who believe, so that they have all their sins forgiven and blotted out. Instead, they themselves must “achieve the holiness necessary to enter heaven, by paying money into the coffers of Rome, for themselves or their loved ones, to win them out of Purgatory and into heaven? It was because the Roman Catholic Church taught this doctrine that there was a Purgatory, a place where supposedly righteous people went to “pay off” their debts of sin and be purified from it; that the practice of granting indulgences for a price began. This was what caused righteous indignation to well up in the mind of Martin Luther; that the Pope would order his priests to do such a thing as sell these pieces of paper which would then supposedly release their loved ones from Purgatory. Luther declared himself against it, and against the whole Papal false system over time. He eventually came to realize that a person could not stay in a church which did not preach and teach that justification was by faith in Christ alone. He came to see that the sacrifice of Christ paid for everything necessary for the forgiveness of all sins. It was offered once for all, and thereby the conscience of the one trusting in Jesus could be cleansed and sins may be blotted out, even as Peter preached in this sermon that we are studying this morning.

Thus began the “re-formation” of the true visible church of Jesus Christ. It began with the conversion of Luther, and many other men before and after him, who repented of their sins and the false doctrine of Rome. They formed new churches in which the Bible was preached and its truth lived out. As time went by, this time of revival became a reformation of the doctrine and practice of these churches away from all of the false doctrines of the Popes and Roman Catholic bishops which had brought about a false gospel and the extensive false doctrine which is still being taught by that church today. Then came times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord being with His people in their worship and service to Him. Then the true gospel began, once again to go forward among the nations. These churches made explicit attempts to define the truth of the Bible in regard to all matters of faith and practice. Out of the Reformation came the great Evangelical Confessions of Faith such as the Augsburg Confession, the Belgic Confession, the Helvetic Confessions, Westminster Confession, and the Baptist 1689 Confession of Faith. Eventually out of the Reformation came Constitutional Government in this country, with the separation of powers in government, and religious liberty written into its founding documents. In these past hundreds of years since the Reformation began, the Church has seen many times of refreshing. The 1st and 2nd Great Awakenings in our own country. These have been revivals of prayer and preaching which greatly helped build Christ’s kingdom and the moral fiber of our nation, where it has existed in the past. Repentance and conversion have been the same in all generations of the New Testament Church. It is turning away from sin and false doctrine wherever it is found. And it is turning to Christ to have your heart and your life changed by the grace which only comes through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is by that grace; learning to share Christ with others and praying that His kingdom would be advanced by missions and evangelism. Yes, even missions and evangelism came out of the

Reformation, because at the Reformation the love of the truth came to light once again, so that many people could see and be saved, and revived, and refreshed by it.

Now 2ndly - We want to look at the subject of Christ's coming (the times of restoration) in relation to these times of refreshing. (verses 20 and 21)

It says again in verse 19 – “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that God may send Jesus Christ who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” I think that we can say with all certainty that those of the people who heard Peter preach that day, and who did repent; those who were converted to Christ that day, did experience a time of refreshing which came to their own soul because the Holy Spirit was given to them after they believed. They no doubt did experience in their hearts that refreshing, that reviving; that breath of the new resurrection life of Jesus in their souls. That power of Christ through His Spirit convinced them of the truth of the gospel, and He, then, so worked in their hearts that they came to have a complete willingness to follow the Lord in accordance with the Apostle's doctrine and teaching. But we need to understand that this is not “the times of refreshing” which are being spoken of in this text. The times of refreshing being spoken of are being put up alongside “the times of restoration” which are mentioned by the Apostle Peter in respect to what Jesus Christ will do when He returns personally and visibly in His glorious Second Coming.

The times of refreshing are those times, during the Church age, in which the Lord revives His Church; His giving men the ability, by the Holy Spirit, to preach with power. The result of the Spirit's working at these times, is that the power of the Lord is present to give to believers and unbelievers alike, such a sense of His presence and glory that the gospel is received by many, and many persons are converted to Christ. The Word comes with power in the times of preaching in the churches, and sound doctrine in relation to the worship and how Christ is to be served; are more carefully considered. A holy awe comes over whole assemblies of Christians as they sense the majesty and glory of God in their times of worship. The Spirit, during these times of refreshing causes many persons to together see their need of Christ. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit cause many persons together to see how important it is to have the truth of the Word govern every area of what is believed and what is practiced. It is the breath of life, not only to a few; but it is life from the dead to many. It is a prelude to what Christ will do when He returns in His glory with His holy angels and all of His saints. Jesus, at that time, will restore all things. Jesus will raise the dead. The bodies of the saints will be glorified. There will be no sin in their being; body, soul, or spirit; from that Day forward. Holiness will prevail universally. Jesus will engage in the work of the restoration of all things for His people. He will take this fallen physical heavens and earth and He will recreate them before our eyes. He will restore righteousness to the whole heavens and earth when He comes back. Righteousness will dwell and prevail

in the redeemed from all generations as they enter into the Everlasting State. Heaven must receive the Lord Jesus until that glorious time of the final restoration of all things. The Father has said to His Son, "Sit at My right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. All that is coming for every believer in Jesus Christ.

I want to point out to you that the restoration of all things cannot completely take place until Christ returns. In repentance grace is given to a person to turn away from their sins and turn to God. In conversion a person is translated from darkness to light, and from the kingdom of Satan to God. During this present evil age there will be times of revival. There will be times of Reformation and refreshing. But there will not be an end to sin in the world, or sin in men living upon the earth until Christ returns and the times of the Restoration of all things begin. But still, the Scriptures tell us, and we should pray for these further and greater times of refreshing. Because in the times of refreshing whether it is in the Reformation, or in the Great Awakenings, or in the Millennium which I believe is yet to come, many people, together, come to know the Spirit's working in relation to themselves, their church, the churches of a whole region or country, and indeed in the final and greatest time of refreshing which is yet to come; nations shall be converted unto God. When I say that; I am not meaning to say that every person in a nation would be converted, but rather that a great number from every nation would be savingly brought to God. You can see truth for yourself if you will turn over to Isaiah Chapter 60. "Arise shine for your light has come!" "And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you." "For behold the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the Lord will arise over you and His glory will be seen upon you." "The Gentiles (or the nations) shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising." "Lift up your eyes all around, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; Your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be nursed at your side." "The you shall see and become radiant, and your heart shall swell with joy; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you." Who is it that these verses are speaking of? I believe that it is speaking of the nation of Israel, to whom these promises in Acts 3 were made; the physical seed of Israel being converted and brought into the New Testament Church. In the context, darkness had covered the earth and deep darkness the people; but the Lord will rise upon them, and His glory will be seen upon them; and then the Gentiles (the nations shall come to their light, and kings to the brightness of their rising from being spiritually dead. The abundance of the sea; that is the nations and the people of those Gentile nations shall be turned to them (that is to pay attention to the gospel of Christ which they will have received and believed; many Jews together. As it says in Isaiah 59: 20 just two verses before, The Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob.

And this then leads me 3rdly to say - We need to see the central role which the Jews will yet come to have in regard to world-wide times of refreshing.

We need to remember that besides the many Jews that did believe that day at Peter's preaching that day, (and Chapter 4, verse 4 says about 5000 men believed; even more than on the day of Pentecost); that there was a most definite rejection of the gospel by the majority of the leaders of the Jewish nation, which led to the persecution of the Apostles and also those who had believed in their Word. That eventually led to the Lord's not coming to give them the times of refreshing which He could have given to them as a nation at that time. Rather, Our God came against them to destroy them as a nation in 70 A.D. They had, as a nation, rejected their Messiah. They had not recognized the day of their visitation. Those were called, "the days of vengeance" in Luke Chapter 21. Turn over with me to Luke 21: 20. Here Jesus is speaking, and He says, "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near." "Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her." "For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled." "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!" "For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people." "And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations." "And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." This rejection, by the majority of the Jews of Jesus' day, continued down through the years of the ministry of the Apostles, and it has continued down through the generations of time, down to this very day. If the Jewish leaders of that day had repented, then God would have sent Jesus Christ to them in a very special way of refreshing, as a nation and a corporate body of people. They would have entered the New Testament Church along with the others who did believe, and great things would have come to their nation and to the Gentile nations of the world if they had become witnesses to the grace of Christ which saves from sins. But they did not believe, and so this is what the Apostle Paul says in 1st Thessalonians Chapter 2, verse 14 to those who did believe, explaining what would happen to those who rejected Christ. "For you brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus." "For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost."

Now we need to ask ourselves if we believe that God has cast off physical Israel as a nation forever, since He came and destroyed them in 70 A.D. Some Christians believe that He has. But I would like to declare to you my firm conviction, which comes from the Scriptures, that Israel will indeed someday be brought to the place where they will repent of their sins and be converted and then God will send Jesus Christ to them, spiritually speaking, to give to them times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. Remember that the text, which I just read to you from Luke, refers to Jerusalem being trodden down by the Gentiles until the times of the

Gentiles are fulfilled? These times evidently are not fulfilled; for there in Jerusalem, the Gentiles are still trampling upon it. But it shall not always be. Turn with me over to Romans Chapter 11. “I say then,” says the Apostle Paul, “has God cast away His people?” “Certainly not!” “For I also am an Israelite of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.” God has not cast away his people whom He foreknew.” Verse 5 – “Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.” He then goes on to show that down through these many years since their rejection of their Messiah, there has always been a remnant according the election of grace, and the rest were hardened against Christ and the gospel. But is this to continue to the end of the age? Look at verse 11. “I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall?” “Certainly not!” “But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.” “Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! What he is speaking of, my brethren, is their conversion; their national conversion which they rejected at the beginning of the Church age when they rejected Christ. And their becoming powerful witnesses to Christ for God. Verse 15 – “For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead.” Verse 25 – “For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” The Apostle is no longer talking about the remnant being saved; he is speaking of the whole body of the Jews being saved. “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.”

This, I believe, will be the greater fulfillment of the promise which Peter spoke of in the verses that we are studying this morning. “Repent therefore and be converted, you Jews, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before. This is a spiritual coming of Christ that is being spoken of; not the Second Coming of Christ. This is a tremendous revival which is yet to be seen to come about; the conversion and restoration of the Jews; their being brought into the Church. It can only come about by the pouring out of Christ’s Spirit among them. This is what is spoken of Ezekiel 37, in the vision given to the prophet concerning valley of the dry bones, and how they came together, had flesh come upon them, and then the breath from God breathed into them. These bones represented the whole house of Israel. But another passage which is very striking is Zechariah Chapter 12, verse 10. “And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced.” “Yes they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a first-born.” “In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo.” “And the land shall mourn, every family by itself: the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their

wives by themselves; the family of Shimei by itself and their wives by themselves; all the families that remain, every family by itself, and the wives by themselves.” “In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.” I believe that this is the same event predicted in Romans 11: 24, and it is the fulfillment of the verses that we are studying this morning. “They are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with their fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’” The conversion of the Jews and their being brought into the Church is yet to come. The greatest times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord are yet to come. The fullness of the Gentiles and the fullness of the Jews is yet to come. And you and I ought to pray for this pouring out of the Spirit. What is it that prevents these times of refreshing from coming? On the part of the Jews, it is their hardness of heart; their not seeing their need of Christ and repentance. On our part; it is that many Gentile Christians in our day no longer look for God to do these great wonders, and they do not believe in the future conversion of the Jews. But we can help Christ’s cause forward by remembering the times of refreshing which God brought at the Reformation. Those times are connected to these. God Himself will bring these great things about.

In closing this sermon, I hope that you can now see, that as a result of Rome’s teaching, Christ’s kingdom had not advanced, but rather had fallen into great darkness for a thousand years. The Reformation was God sending the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of certain chosen men; shining His glorious light upon the Word of God once again; shining into their hearts so that they would repent of their sins and that those who would lead the true Church would preach the truth of the Bible, and not the traditions of men. This was the beginning of the recovery of sound doctrine to the Church which has allowed the Church to advance with the gospel and with the truth of the Word of God among the nations, once again, as a result of these changes. The men who spear-headed the Reformation; Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, were men who themselves were once Roman Catholics and they repented of that false system of doctrine, and were converted to Jesus Christ. They, then, began to preach the truth of the Bible and preach the true gospel of Jesus Christ. The Reformation, as it continued, brought about great and lasting changes in the spiritual perspective of many people among many nations; especially in the 10 kingdoms of Europe, the kingdoms and countries where the gospel had spread; from the time of the Apostles until the year 1517. These times of refreshing eventually led to further Reformation of the Church by the Calvinistic Baptists in England; the forefathers of our own movement of churches. They saw that for the times of refreshing to continue, that the doctrine of Baptism must be addressed. They saw that the practice of infant baptism was a part and parcel of Popery. They saw that baptism was for believers only, and that it must follow faith in Christ and is, in reality a part of conversion. This is where all of these precious truths which we have been studying today, come together. I have read writers on the subject of the conversion of the Jews who say that the Jews cannot think about becoming Christians as they

behold the worship of images which takes place in the Roman Catholic Church. They see it as a form of idolatry. This is correct. Therefore, if we Gentile Christians who know the Lord will preach against the idolatry and false doctrine of the Popes and pray for those who hold to the teaching of that false church to repent; perhaps the Holy Spirit will attend our preaching; the false doctrine will be destroyed and the Jews will be given grace by God to see the light. So let us pray together that the Lord will enable His true Church of those who hold to the Bible and sound doctrine, to know more of the Holy Spirit's working together with them, in their labors for propagation of truth. Let us begin to pray for the conversion of the Jews, for when they are converted, the greatest times of refreshing that the world has ever seen will come.