

COMING BACK TO GOD 2

INTRO: I gave several messages on leaving God. Now I want to do a few on coming back to God. One reason for this is that maybe some of us have been leaving and we are not aware of it. Another reason is to give us hope. There is hope. It looks very dark for the Church in our town, our province our country and for America as a whole. But there is hope, but there is only one hope that I see, and that is coming back to God.

I won't discuss our text for these messages. This is only an introduction. My subject refused to be outlined in the time I had. You can see that on the outline I gave you. I will just preach until I run out of time, and then we'll stop.

Our text in our previous messages was Isaiah 57:11, which says, *And of whom have you been afraid, or feared, That you have lied And not remembered Me, Nor taken it to your heart? Is it not because I have held My peace from of old That you do not fear Me?* The world, the flesh and the devil are huge intimidating factors in every life. And when we are intimidated by any of those, we lose our fear of God, and we begin to be dishonest with God, and we forget him, and do not keep Him on our hearts.

And it is a most amazing thing, one that I am only now beginning to understand; that when we leave God, many times God has to remain silent, and sometimes for a long time, and sometimes judgment is the only thing left. And I have pondered that. Why does He remain silent? You remember, this silence is not a silence in words. This silence is a silence in action. You might tell your child not to do something, and they do it and you warn them. But they persist, and finally your words turn to action, or they should. And once the board of education is applied to the seat of learning, you get action; obedient action. Someone said, there is a direct connection between the seat and the heart. Well, when discipline happens, all of a sudden the child's hearing just greatly improves.

How young do children understand this board of education? Very young. Under one year old. Now don't listen to the psychological specialists of our day. They are training up a whole generation of rebels. We will never improve on God's methods of dealing with children. He says in Proverbs 22:15, *Foolishness is bound*

up in the heart of a child; The rod of correction will drive it far from him. Now you see, this child is your child, if you have one. Every child is like this. You really have to watch the nice quiet ones. Sometimes they are worse than the outward rebel.

And what takes care of foolishness? The rod of correction! Proverbs 23:13 says, *Do not withhold correction from a child, For if you beat him with a rod, he will not die.* The implications are that if you do not spank, he will die. Proverbs 29:15 says, *The rod and rebuke give wisdom, But a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.* Oh how many times my wife and I have seen this. Many times we would like to give a bit of advice. Proverbs 23:14 says, *You shall beat him with a rod, And deliver his soul from hell.*

Now our subject is coming back to God. Why did I tell you about children? Because if we are truly born again, then we are God's children. We are born of Him. We call that the new birth. Jesus said unless you are born again you cannot enter the kingdom of God. And if we are His children, He deals with us as such and He will discipline us. You see, just as children are prone to foolishness, so are we prone to leave God and go our own way. And because God loves us, He disciplines us. Some people think they love their child too much to discipline cute little Sally, or little Johnny. But that is not love. Listen to Proverbs 13:24, *He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly.* Chapter 19:18 then says, *Chasten your son while there is hope, And do not set your heart on his destruction.* If we do not discipline, we have set our heart on their destruction. That is not love.

Now you see, God is our Father and we are His children, and He is a good Father, and so He will chasten us. Let me ask you, how many of you have felt the rod of God? How do you like it? What would happen if He did not do it? Psalm 119:67 says, *Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word.* So, do you know what Proverbs says to us adult children? Listen to Proverbs 3:11, *My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor detest His correction.*

Turn to Hebrews 12. Maybe God will chasten some of us in these messages, I ask you, do you wish God to do this, should it be necessary? You see, Job had a spiritual tumor growing in his

soul, and God disciplined him, and afterward it yielded the peaceable fruit of righteousness. Oh how I dislike chastening. Oh how quick I am to excuse myself, and to argue. I don't want to be chastened, but it is better to be chastened than to be allowed to wander too far, because then we may never come back.

Let's begin in Hebrews 12:1:

1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

The letter to the Hebrews was written to backsliding Jewish believers. Over and over again in this letter they are warned. Listen to Hebrews 3:12, *Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;* You see, he is speaking to believers. And he is warning them that an evil heart of unbelief might be in them, leading them to depart from God, which is what they were doing. Listen to 2:3. The writer says, *how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation...* How shall believers escape, not if they neglect to get saved, but if they neglect their salvation. Unbelief always brings about sin, and sin causes us to neglect our salvation. And so the writer says that chastening to bring us back is better than being left, like a child, in his or her rebellion, with its certain consequences.

Now I do not know where each one of us is. You look like a very good lot. And if you are, and if I am, we have no need to worry of chastening. But there are sometimes things in us we are not aware of. Let me give you an example.

As I began to think of the subject of coming back to the Lord my son-in-law and I were going up into the Northwest Territories to work for a few days. They have a place to live in a town called Enterprise, and I decided to go with him. I had always wanted to catch an Arctic Greyling. That is a beautiful fish that is found in the northern waters.

But before we left, since I had the subject of coming back to God on my heart, I went to my library and took out the book, "By My Spirit", by Jonathan Goforth, written many years ago. He was

born in 1936 and was a missionary to China and a revival preacher.

While we were driving I began to read and I had not read far and I came under conviction about something in my own life. How that happened I do not know. The matter had taken place a number of years ago. And before I begin these messages, I need to make a public confession. Goforth talked about preachers, and their need to make confession when wrong has taken place. When I read that, a matter came forcefully to my mind.

So, as I was reading, I came to where Goforth said this in one paragraph, "We say, as a rule, because we have known many, usually such as have been responsible for the salvation of others, e.g. ministers and Church leaders of one sort or another, for whom secret acknowledgement of sin has not been sufficient." Here is what he is saying, and he said it is especially true of preachers. They may confess to God, but some do not get the victory unless they acknowledge publically their wrong.

And here is my confession. When we had J. Mark Horst from Heralds of Hope speak in a missions conference, at the end I prayed for the missionaries. And I shared that years ago I had been asked to take on that ministry. My wife and I felt immediately that this was not a work we should enter. But as I read Goforth that memory came strongly to me and the Lord said, "You were boasting." And as I read this paragraph in Goforth I knew that before I could give these messages I had to make that public confession. You will most likely remember nothing about that, but that does not matter. I want to be free of that, and acknowledge that wrong. Is there anyone here that remembers that? I have asked the Lord to forgive me, would you forgive me?

I hope the Lord does not find one more thing in me. But if there is something, then I pray He will expose it and give me the courage to clean it up. I hope the Lord finds nothing in you, but if there is, may I ask you, do you want Him to show you? And if He shows you something, will you take care of it? When this happens to me, I feel I have been disciplined by God. There is little I fear more.

Let me tell you a little story. The Sutera Twins were going to have revival meetings in a certain place. The pastor of the church where they were going, went out by himself into the woods to spend a day with the Lord. He wanted the Lord to search his heart, and show him if there was anything to clean up before the meetings began. Well, you would not believe it. He was all clean. The Lord found nothing in him. He went home rejoicing, and the meetings began. If I remember right, it took some time and then the Lord got a hold of his heart and He found in him one thing after another, and that pastor broke before God and the people.

Now the Lord will not find anything in me or you if there is nothing. Oh no. He is good. But if there should be something you are unaware of, are you willing for God to reveal it? Would you honestly say, "Search me O God, and see if there be any wicked way in me?" Usually, on a subject like this, it is best if one can preach for at least an hour night after night. Sometimes 7-12 days is necessary for the Lord to begin to penetrate, because there is such strong resistance in us to repent and confess. We may take over the summer on these messages, depending how many Sundays we miss. This is not good for these kind of messages, but ask God to speak to you in between the Sundays we will take for these messages.

So I will begin again in Hebrews 12:1:

1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

We, as believers, are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses who have gone to glory before us. In light of these witnesses, which includes many of the great people of the OT, He encourages us to run with patience, the race set before us, that is our Christian life. We go on:

2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

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I have mentioned this to you before. It does not say that He is the author and finisher of our faith, but the author and finisher of THE faith. That is the sum total of the one and only faith, the true faith. Verse 3:

3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

4 ¶ You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.

Now here we get the picture that these Hebrew Christians were getting outside opposition. Like Isaiah 57:11, they were being intimidated by outside pressure. The same holds true for many of us. There is outside pressure, seeking to bring us under the power of intimidation. Verse 5:

5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;

Now it is our natural tendency to despise chastening. It is easy to become discouraged when we are rebuked. But that is the exact wrong response. So we go to verse 6:

6 For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives."

When we are chastened, it is a sign of God's love. It is discipline. When man is judged, it is a sign of His righteousness. He has had enough. Verse 7:

7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

Now listen carefully to what he is saying. If God does not chasten us, we are illegitimate children. We were not born from God. We were born from somebody else. Verse 9:

9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?

10 For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.

11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

I dread little more than being convicted by the Holy Spirit for some wrong I have done. If we do not despise that chastening, if we are not discouraged by it, then we repent and deal with whatever it is God is speaking to us about. This is the way back to God. Now you see, it is not only those who have wandered far away from God who need to come back. It is those who have wandered astray, even just a little bit. If we do not return when we have strayed a little bit, it will get bigger and bigger. That is always the case. It may end up in divorce or other very serious sins. We have seen some very sad things from professing Christians who allowed sin into their lives. Verse 12:

12 Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees,

13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:

15 looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;

16 lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.

17 *For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.*

What is the sum of this? Return to God before it is too late. When you have experienced very serious sin in church troubles like we have, and liars are exalted and truth is put down, it is possible to become bitter. There all kinds of things in life that can lead to despising God and becoming discouraged. And there can come a time when no place is found for repentance, though it is sought diligently with tears. The answer? Repent, and come back to God before sin leads you farther than you ever intended to go.

Well, we have covered several messages on leaving God. We have seen that, in the Church in America, we are presently in a state of leaving God. This has been our direction for many years now. We have seen that man is prone to wander away from God. This can be traced back to Adam and Eve's first sin. In the time of the Judges, we see seven such cycles of blessing, backsliding, bondage, brokenness. We are without any reservation and most certainly not in a state of blessing. We are also most certainly not in a state of brokenness. We are, however, most certainly in a state of backsliding and bondage. I see no other possibility of coming back to a state of blessing without brokenness happening first, and there is little pride despises more.

In North America we have mega churches and programs and machinery, but we do not have blessing. Billy Graham, years ago, preached on the man in the OT who lost his ax head. And Elisha made the axe head swim. Now it is not the intent of that account, I think, to illustrate what Billy Graham took it for, but the illustration was good in itself. Someone listening to a message once said, "Good message, wrong text." But Graham used the illustration of trying to chop down trees with an axe handle with no head, and said it was like doing church work without the Holy Spirit. That is where we have been for years. We need a divine move of God.

In history past, in the time of the OT God stepped into history and shook up His people, and called them back. Now I have mentioned this in the previous messages, but let me tell you again what I see. Why does God wait so long sometimes before He

steps in? Why has He not stepped into our downward spiral? Why does it seem that for a long time God has gone to sleep? Why does He not do something? I am not talking about His not speaking through messengers, like the prophets. You know what happened to them. They were killed.

I am talking about His speaking by stepping in by action. Well, in the times of the judges He stepped in through raising up various leaders, and they brought Israel back to the faith. He warned the northern kingdom over and over, and in stubborn rebellion they resisted, and in 722 BC, they were taken captive and dispersed among the nations.

Well, after years of preaching, I am telling you what I see. Whether I am right or not, the future may show. I am not a man of wide knowledge, as some preachers have, but I have spent over forty years in Christian ministry. What do I see? The professing Christian world is in need of a divine visitation. We need God to step in. We get a monthly paper called, "The Herald Of His Coming" and it had an article on its front page of a message called, "Divine Visitation - Man's Great Hope."

The man who gave the message was Richard Owen Roberts, who is now in his 80's. He has been interested in revival, and times of God's special visitation to His people. And he sees a divine visitation as man's one great hope. Today, some preachers are writing off America. It does look bad, but there is hope. I know it looks dark. Study the continual expansion of liberalism both inside and outside the church, and it looks almost impossible, but it is not. A church in our community, in my view, is inviting demons here in the name of Christ. The rock band they are inviting is called the "Informants." As I have studied this subject of coming back to God, and hear what is being said and done, one of the reasons I feel these messages are important is to give you hope. I am saying that it may not be too late yet. There is hope.

Well, let me read for you how this message in the Herald of His Coming began. He says, "For weeks, in thoughtful preparation for these days, I was investigating the term 'visit' or 'visitation' in the Scripture. I am somewhat surprised and a bit grieved to discover that the more frequent use of those terms in Scripture had to do with judgment and condemnation. Far fewer passages

deal with divine visitations that were of the positive revival sort. My intention is to speak on the positive divine visitation..." end quote. That is my purpose. It is coming back to God. But in this man's discovery, God's divine visitation was more often for judgment than for discipline.

Now I am not a student of revival or coming back to God, but as I see it, for a divine visitation, we are in need of two things. First, in order for the Church to be brought back from her sinfulness, she will have to come into a state that is conducive to coming back. She will have to come to a point where she hungers for truth and righteousness. This hunger is sadly lacking in our community; it is lacking in our nation, and it is lacking in all of America! She must be brought to brokenness and humility.

In one sense, we, like the prodigal, are in the pig pen. Anyone with spiritual eyes and a godly life can see that. What we are doing so far, is improving our pig pen. We have mega pig pens. All kinds of venues; but they are still pig pens. And until God finds humility in us, we are not ready for God to step in. If God should step in by action, as I see it, at this point it would be useless. We are not hungering for God. We are not thirsting for righteousness. We do not have a heart to pray for revival. That is true of me, and I think I can say that is true of us here. Unless we are brought down far enough, and we become willing to humble ourselves and cry out to God, and we see there is no other way back, no showers of blessing are in sight.

Without question, man's chief problem is pride. Pride is the fence that keeps us in the pig pen. The gate out of the pen is repentance and confession, and when it comes to repentance and confession, pride has met its greatest opponent. Turn to Matthew 13. I was translating Matthew 13 into Low German the other day, and I came across this statement several times, which occurs elsewhere as well; it is this, "He that has ears to hear, let him hear." So I ask, who has ears to hear? The one who has been brought to humility, the condition of being willing to repent and confess. In the state we are in today, not many have ears to hear.

Look at verse 9:

9 *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"*

Look at what the disciples said about Jesus speaking to the crowds in parables, verse 10:

10 *And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"*

Look at Jesus answer:

11 *He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.*

12 *"For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.*

13 *"Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.*

14 *"And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive;*

15 *For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.'*

Why can people not hear? They cannot be reduced to a condition where they want to hear! They must be moved to wanting to hear. There is no use talking to such people. Repentance is far from them.

Turn to Matthew 11. We begin in verse 7:

7 *As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?"*

8 *"But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.*

9 *"But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.*

Jesus said, "What caused you to go into the wilderness to see? You don't go into the wilderness to see a queen or king or a president, or any big influential man. You go to palaces for that. But what did you want to see? A prophet? Yes, and more than a prophet. And what was more than a prophet about John? Verse 10:

10 *"For this is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.'*

11 *"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*

And how did John prepare the way for Christ? By preaching repentance! Now I will tell you something. I will prophecy this. If God will raise up a godly man who can bring people to repentance, not only the Christian will go out to hear this man. The world will go to see him! I have seen enough to know this. The world is not impressed with Christianity until they see the Christian is real, and the Christian is not real until repentance takes place. You can take any number of courses on soul winning, but no soul winning takes place like it does among those who have come back to God! And when that happens, newspapers become interested in what the Church has to say. History has shown this. But notice verse 12 now:

12 *"And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.*

For a long time I have pondered that verse. What does it mean? Here is what I believe it means. When a sinner's heart, or the Christian's hardened heart is made soft, and he breaks before God, you can't keep him from repenting. You can't keep him from confessing. He will hardly be able to wait until it is his turn to confess what his heart has been harboring. Such people will

take the kingdom by force, if you like, and God won't mind that they are pushy. Its like your child being bossy with you, very bossy, and he says, "Mommy, Daddy, make me be a good boy", or, "Make me be a good girl." You wouldn't mind them being bossy like that, would you?

You see, before real revival, you cannot drag a person to repentance, and you can't drag him to confess. You can show him things in black and white, and it means nothing. When true humility sets in, the penitent can't wait to repent and confess. And when people cannot wait to repent and confess, you know you have a divine visitation. God has stepped in. This is the work of God. This is what we need today. So, first, the Christian's hard heart has to be softened.

Jesus said in John 14:12, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.* I do not know if I am right, but I have come to see that if one can be instrumental in bringing about repentance in stubborn sinners, that is a greater work than any physical miracle. I have said it takes more for God to make a proud man humble than to create the universe. Certainly it takes much more time. So, first, the Church needs to be brought to a state conducive to coming back to God.

The second thing we need is a man of God. A special man of God. In Ezekiel 22 the Lord mourns over the state of Israel. He said they were like dross. When you heat metals until they turn to liquid, impurities in the metal rise to the top. What rises to the top is scum. It is useless junk, and God said He had turned up the heat on His nation, and all that came up was scum, dross. Israel had become dross. It was a sad day. And then in verse 30 the Lord says, "'So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one.'

At the time Ezekiel wrote, God's people had come to a state where the time for discipline was almost past, and judgment would have to come. So the Lord sought for a man to stand in the gap. And in this case He said He found none. If you want something to pray about, pray about that. Well then in verse 31 the Lord says, "'Therefore I have poured out My indignation on

them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads,' says the Lord GOD."

Our day of judgment is approaching. It is the visitation of judgment. Oh for a visitation of repentance and turning back to God! God is in search of a man. God is in search of a people ready to humble themselves. In the right time, it takes only a spark to set things off.

I will have to close off here because of time. We'll pick up here next time.