

Why Revival Tarries

By Dr. Alan Cairns

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Faith Free Presbyterian Church

1207 Haywood Road
Greenville, SC 29615

Website: www.faithfpc.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/faith

I hope you took good note that that hymn was translated from what Martin Luther wrote. So it is one of Luther's great hymns and I think it is well worth knowing and you sang it very, very well. So that encourages me to have it again. Think of the words that you will have sung. You will see the quintessence of Luther's theology in that song. And you will see why it was so revolutionary, living by mercy, living by faith, not by the fear of a priest, not by the merit of works, not by the ritual of a church, but by free grace received through faith alone.

We take these things so much for granted and yet this was the dynamite that shook the world as Luther and other were used of God to preach it so.

I had better not get preaching on Luther's hymn or we will never get to the reading and the preaching of the message this evening.

May I take a moment to thank all of you who were praying for us during the nine weeks that Joan and I were gone? The church has done very well in my absence. I think I should stay away more often. Various things have happened the and the Lord has blessed.

I see Dr. Killmyer and his bride with us. We welcome you. And, again, it is wonderful what happens when go away, Greg. We were praying for you for years. But anyway, we bid you welcome.

And all who have started to visit during my absence, we bid you welcome and you have to stay at least for a while because you have been visiting all summer and I arrive and you disappear I will certainly be in trouble with the session and the committee.

For those of you who have come to school at BJ and you have been here in the past and you have come to be with us again, welcome back, and for those who have come for the first time. You are feeling maybe a little strange far from home and you wonder if there is anybody normal in Greenville. Well, the answer is yes. I live here. So we will be glad to help you in any way we can to settle in and to get over the peculiar difficulties of being in a strange place among strange people with all they pressures of a new kind of life and all the expectations that are placed upon you.

I would also thank you, as I say, for your prayers for us. We had a very busy time at the commencement of the time in Northern Ireland. Then I took three Lord's Days completely away from preaching and it was good to be able to go and hear John Greer preach. I am not sure that he appreciated it as much as I did, but it is always good to hear him preach and to go to Ballymoney and hear Mr. Park and the preaching certainly was good for me to be able to listen in for a change. So that was a great encouragement.

The rest of the time was quite busy, but the Lord did bless. As I said this morning as far as all the visits and all the places we have got to go and see where concerned, we had many good times going around to churches, getting over to the church in Gardenstown where our group who went to Northern Ireland and Scotland got to visit a few weeks before me, but we got to see that and preach there. And I think we knew the Lord's presence.

But of all the places I got as I said this morning, the most moving for me was to go two Sabbath days ago to the home of a little girl who listens to us, watches us on SermonAudio every week that she possibly can. This is part of her Lord's Day and she was very interested that Dr. Barrett and I would be able to go and visit her. His meetings were away at the other end of the country and he couldn't make it in the time available. But since I was able to go to preach in her home church I made it over to the little village of Kesh and if you don't know where Kesh is you look at a map of Northern Ireland. You will see a place called Loch Earn. It is a very picturesque place and Kesh is in a beautiful setting.

Hannah Fallows lives there. Hannah is confined to bed. She has a condition, a genetic condition. The family has already lost two little ones. And Hannah has reached the age of almost 10 and this genetic condition is spinal atrophy and she is therefore confined to bed.

A sweeter little one you will not find. Her faith is very real. Her love for the Lord is very real and her smile is very real. It was certainly very, very encouraging for me to go to be with her, to be able to read with her and pray with her. And this morning to have her special request. And I think it is interesting, isn't it? We find the same here in this church. You let the children give their requests. I gave Hannah to request, if we can sing it, we will do it. And she asked for the 46th Psalm.

You see, when the chips are really down, when you need to prove God, it is not some stupid little country and western ditty that sounds more like a love song sung by a half drunk idiot in a pub or a bar that you want to have. It is something that will bring you in touch with God, that brings deep and eternal realities to the soul and that brings the comfort of the gospel. And Hannah asked for that 46th Psalm. And I am glad that we were able to sing it and I think as far as the rest of the congregation was concerned, that leaves Mike and me out of it, we sang it well.

So that was the highlight.

I do appreciate your prayers for my sister who had a serious stroke when we were home and her second major stroke. And two weeks ago she was paralyzed down the left side. Didn't know who we were or what was going on. Everything was very, very confused and very troublesome. And she is due to go home on Tuesday.

Now I don't think she is fit to go home, but she does. And any of you who have ever dealt with a stubborn woman will know what she thinks is what counts.

But she is able to walk now with the aid of a cane and she is determined that without any help to get up, to get dressed, to get showered, to clean, to cook or do anything else without any help. She is going to do it all.

So she will either do it or it will kill her. But, as I told her, if I were your doctor I would certify you insane and hold you for another few weeks. But she didn't think that that would be very wise.

However, I do appreciate your prayers. Do continue to pray for Betty. She has indomitable spirit and the Lord did bless through her being in the hospital. Right next door to her was a lady a very, very kind and gracious person, the kind of person you would like to have as a neighbor, the kind of a person you would like to have to deal with, just a nice person.

And she had been in hospital for 14 weeks. And then on top of the stroke that she had suffered, they came with the news that she was terminally ill with cancer and things were developing very quickly before we left. It is not easy under the circumstances to get the opportunity to speak to folk because there are visitors up and it is not a private ward. But I did have the opportunity to meet with her, to talk with her and to seek to explain the gospel to her and to invite her to Christ.

She told me that she had never come to Christ. And she was in a lot of pain with a lot of medication. So I was able to try to press the claims of the gospel upon her and to plead with her to take very seriously the call of Christ and the necessity for an urgent getting right with God with the promise of the gospel and if she came to Christ he would not cast her out.

Visitors came just at that point and it was impossible to carry on the conversation with any depth of personal application, but in the middle of the night before she left, she was sent home, really, to die. And in the middle of the night before she left she was tossing and turning in a great deal of pain and my sister knew that and spoke across to her and she said that to tell me because if she missed me the next day—and, indeed they did. They got her away before I got to visit—and she said to tell me that she had listened to what I had said and she was thinking very seriously about what I had put to her.

So we can only pray that the Lord will bless, the Lord will use his Word and the Lord will indeed bring that dear lady to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior.

Now this evening we are turning to the Old Testament Scriptures to the prophecy of Isaiah chapter 59 verse one.

Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness. None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity. They hatch cockatrice' eggs, and weave the spider's web: he that eateth of their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper. Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works: their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands. Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace.

Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men. We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves: we look for judgment, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far off from us. For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions are with us; and as for our iniquities, we know them; In transgressing and lying against the LORD, and departing away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: and the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment.

And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him. For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke. According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his

adversaries, recompense to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompense. So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him. And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD. As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever.¹

Amen. The Lord will add his own blessing to the reading of his precious Word for his name's sake.

Let us briefly seek the Lord in prayer.

Father in heaven, in the precious name of the Lord Jesus we now cry to thee for a very deep and real sense of thy presence as we open this holy Word. Still us before God. Strip away from us everything that would hinder the reception of God's Word. And oh, Lord, we pray tonight for a work of God and for a work of grace by the power of thy Holy Spirit. We ask these things giving thee our thanks in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

Tonight I want us to concentrate upon the opening two verses of this great chapter of God's Word. A casual reading of the chapter will, I am sure, stamp upon your heart the simple truth that here we have enough of the mighty statements of Scripture to keep us occupied for a very long time. There are so many outstanding statements of truth in this chapter that one may easily become overwhelmed.

But I want us start at the beginning. I don't insinuate from that that we will return for the rest. We may. We may not. I don't know. It is not my purpose. If the Lord so directs we will do it. If he doesn't, we won't.

But I do believe we should start here in these opening two verses and give attention to words that I think many Christians have often quoted. But I wonder just how deeply we have pondered them.

Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.²

Speaking from this text the great C H Spurgeon addressed the subject: Why some seekers are not saved. And he emphasized that there were people who appeared to be fairly seeking after Christ and yet they never did get saved. His point was that the reason for

¹ Isaiah 59:1-21.

² Isaiah 59:1-2.

that was not because of any lack of power in God, but because despite their apparent seeking after Christ there are people who have such a love of sin and they have such a hold on their sin and their sin has such a hold of them that while seeking, apparently, they really have no will, no desire to have Christ on God's terms.

Now as you would expect from Spurgeon, it was a great sermon. And certainly it is a sermon that we would do well to consider. People who appear to be seeking Christ, but all too often the very act of seeking is but a cover up for a deeper love than any love of God within them, a deeper search than any search for truth. And that is the search to indulge themselves and yet cook their sin under an apparent crying out for mercy.

A great Scottish preacher by the name of Thomas Boston used this same text and spoke of how sin separates men from God. And surely again it is a wonderful truth, one that we would do well to pay attention to. Boston spoke of the dreadful evil of separation from God. I think that that is a terrible thought, that all too often is very rarely mentioned or hardly mentioned in the pulpits of our land. We live in a day of feel good religion when it seems to be the whole purpose of the pulpit to give people an immediate buzz.

But there is very little attention being paid to the solemn reality of a present and permanent separation from God.

I want you to think of this. You are either reconciled to God or you are alienated from God. You are either as near to the heart of God as Jesus Christ himself or you are as far from God as Satan himself. That great gulf of separation between the sinner and God is one that is fixed for all eternity. When that soul goes out of this world without saving faith in Jesus Christ it is a terrible evil to be separated from God.

And if I tonight could only impress the reality of what it means to be separated from God, to be separated from the only source of light, the only source of life, the only source of joy, the only source of peace, the only hope for life or for eternity. If I could make people understand just how desperately terrible it is to be separated from God, I think that souls would tremble just at the thought that between my heart and my God there is a great gulf fixed.

Are you saved tonight or are you experiencing this dreadful evil as Boston called it, this terrible calamity, separation from God?

Boston went on to speak of the party with whom the blame for this separation lies. It is not God who has separated himself from the sinner. It is the sinner by his sin who has separated himself from God.

In other words you will not go to eternal separation without your own willful act to do so. And the cause of evil, he pointed out, is your iniquity.

So here are great preachers and they are taking the text in this evangelistic way. And I have to say and I have to say that these are powerful and necessary uses of this text. And

yet having said that, I conclude that they are not the primary force of the text. I think that the message here is primarily is a message to God's church.

Notice the position of the text. Chapter 58 ends with this promise in verse 14, "Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it."³

That is how 58 ends. Chapter 60 describes the millennial glory of the gospel.

"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee."⁴

Great millennial chapter of the gospel's fullness.

And in between them we have the is doleful passage here in chapter 59.

Now that suggests to me a very clear line of thinking. With such a promise as 58:14, with such a prospect as chapter 60 sets before us, a prospect of final success, why are we not seeing the gospel sweep the world in this day in which we are living? Why are God's people so generally living in abject spiritual poverty with so little spiritual power that the enemy comes in like a flood, flooding both church and state with all the wickedness of hell and we seem impotent to do anything about it?

And perhaps most immediately, why are we—and I speak of us as a church. I speak of us as parents. I speak of us as witnesses for Christ—why are we with such promises and with the prospect of full, final success for the gospel laid before us, why are we seeing so few people genuinely saved?

I think these are some of the questions that this text forces to the surface. I said I think the message, though it has an application to the lost, I think the message is primarily to the Church of Christ and it deals with a subject that should be near to every believer's heart. It deals with a subject that I trust God will burn into the consciousness of this congregation. And it is quite simply why revival tarries. That is what the prophet invites us now to consider.

And as we think of the text and the subject let me start right at rock bottom and make the statement that throughout all history the Lord has done wondrous things in answer to prayer and in bringing deliverance to his people. That has been true throughout all history.

The classic example, of course, in the Old Testament was the deliverance of Israel out of the land of Egypt with all of its bitterness and bondage.

³ Isaiah 58:14.

⁴ Isaiah 60:1.

The Lord said to Moses, “I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them.”⁵

Pharaoh opposed it. Pharaoh had money. Pharaoh had men. Pharaoh had the military. Pharaoh had all in the eyes of man that was necessary to frustrate any movement to liberate the people of Israel from the bondage of Egypt.

But one thing he could not cope with was spiritual power. And when God’s people were crying under the grinding bondage of Egypt, when they were crying out to God the ear of God in heaven listened to them and God moved in answer to that cry and not all the money and not all the manpower and not all the military might that Pharaoh could muster could do anything to stop what God was doing. And God answered prayer and delivered his people.

He did again and again for his people. Through Joshua he led them into the Promised Land. He brought down the walls of Jericho. He defeated confederacies of nations that were set for their destruction. He planted them in the land. When they by their sin came under the bondage again of heathen tormentors, he intervened and raised up Judges. And, once and again, he heard the cry of a beleaguered people and he brought them deliverance in answer to their prayer. He finally raised up a man after his own heart, David, to be king and he built them into a mighty monarchy that was under the control of the ultimate monarch, the Lord of glory.

Nehemiah summed up that entire Old Testament period, chapter nine verse 27 of that book says, “Therefore thou deliveredst them into the hand of their enemies, who vexed them: and in the time of their trouble, when they cried unto thee, thou heardest them from heaven; and according to thy manifold mercies thou gavest them saviours, who saved them out of the hand of their enemies.”⁶

Throughout Old Testament history God heard the cry of his people and he rose to deliver them and bring salvation.

The New Testament church was no less blessed. The New Testament church’s history starts as far as its own activity in the work of Christ was concerned. In Acts chapter two and there you have the Holy Ghost coming down. The people were met, few in number, despised in possession. They had nothing as far as the world was concerned, nothing to shake the strong holds of hell. But they got through to God.

God heard them. God answered them. God visited them. And in that one day 3000 people were gloriously converted to the Lord Jesus Christ.

You turn over a page. You come to the fourth chapter of the book of the Acts and, again, God heard his people and 5000 people were converted to Christ. And God was building

⁵ Acts 7:34.

⁶ Nehemiah 9:27.

up the Church. When persecution arose and the people of God were scattered from Jerusalem, they went to save their lives, but they were not caring about their lives because they continued preaching Christ.

And we find in chapter eight that the Lord moved marvelously bringing a mighty revival to Samaria. And then introducing the gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch and through him to the African continent.

Chapter 12 we find Peter lying in jail under sentence of death. James had already been murdered. It looked bleak for Peter.

By the way, you will get an insight of what it is to trust the Lord here. As a side light to what I was saying this morning I will trust in thee. Peter was fast asleep.

Now I suggest to you that unless they are given tranquilizers, people who are under sentence of death and expecting to be led out to have their head chopped off the next morning don't normally sleep the sleep of an innocent babe. And Peter was fast asleep.

Do you know why? I honestly believe that Peter, though he didn't know how it was going to happen, knew that he was not going to die that way. He could well remember what the Savior had told him. The Savior told him, "You are going to die the death of a martyr. But you will be an old man when that happens."

And so the younger Peter was completely at peace. God never breaks his Word. We can trust that Word.

But what happened? The Lord intervened. He let him out of the prison. He swung the gates wide open, took the Church by complete surprise. They were that busy praying. They couldn't believe that it had happened, but it had happened. And so throughout the book of the Acts you have God intervening.

And history has seen the pattern repeated over and over again. The early Church captured, conquered the Roman Empire. That is a very simple statement to make. It seems an extravagant statement to make. And yet in reality that is what happened.

It even invaded the most heathen of nations, the wildest of nations.

You think of Ireland. You think it is wild today. Well, it was wilder once. Ireland was so much on the perimeter of the world that I don't think the Romans would have dared to have tried to conquer it. It wasn't worth the bloodshed and the effort. There it was on the edge of the world as it was then, a wild and terrible place.

You have all heard some of the story of the now fabled Saint Patrick. Unfortunately, the fables have taken over and the history has been forgotten. But there was a young man called Patrick. There was a young man who was carried a slave to Ireland. And there in the days of his slavery entered into an experience of saving grace. There was a day when

he escaped from his slavery and there was a day when God called him to go back to his captors with the gospel and the story—not the fables of the Church of Rome dressed up by medieval so called historians for church purposes—but the story of how he went with the gospel and saw Ireland moved for God is one of the brightest pages in Irish Church history. And the result of that went on and on.

It is said that he saw over 300 churches established. In one lifetime one slave boy and God moved in a marvelous way.

Later on we have often dealt with this in the Church, the story of the Protestant Reformation moving Europe with the gospel. The Great Awakening here in America under Whitefield and even before that under Jonathan Edwards. The Second Great Awakening.

By the way, one of the untold stories of American Church history as far as most people are concerned, most preachers even are so ignorant of what happened in the Second Great Awakening. They think revival came through Charles Grandison Finney. Oh, that they would learn a wee bit. It was his perversion of the gospel that finally shut off the revival. But that revival had been running for some 30 years. God blessed in a marvelous way, one of the most long standing movements of the Holy Ghost sweeping many into the kingdom.

Then there was 1857, spread across the Atlantic, 1859 in Ireland, in Scotland, parts of England, God moving in a marvelous way hearing his people, answer their prayer. And since then here and there around the world God moving with great power to the saving of multitudes of souls.

1907 around then the Presbyterian missionary in Korea, having little success saw God begin to move and out of that came one of the greatest modern movement of evangelism in any nation.

Communist China, God has moved and done a great work despite everything that the powers of hell can do to bring to naught the preaching of the gospel.

I remember missionaries going from our nation to Brazil. They were hated. They were despised. They were persecuted. Some of them were put to death as were some Americans. Today on any sabbath day you will find more Protestant Christians worshipping in Brazil than you will find Roman Catholics in their chapels. It is not to say there are more Protestants in Brazil. But such has been the movement of the grace of God. Here and there the Lord has been doing great things.

Understand this. This is the pattern of history, the pattern of history, God moving in answer to prayer.

Let me make the second point and this is foundational to our text. The Lord has lost none of his ancient power. Behold, lo, pay attention to this. Learn it. Don't simply mouth it. Don't simply nod your head with mock piety. Let it get into the heart and into the mind.

“Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear.”⁷

God is as powerful today as ever before. Let us nail the lie of that branch of neo orthodoxy that has preached the God is dead theology. Let us nail the lie of that so called theology that there is no God who intervenes in the affairs of men, that there is no God to hear and answer prayer and that there is no God to move the affairs of men.

This passes as a branch of Christian theology. It is far from Christian. It is far from theological. It is a devilish blasphemy. Our God has lost none of his ancient power.

You should take your New Testament some time and just do a brief study of the texts which contain the words, “He is able,” and you will find there is a number of those texts.

James tells us in chapter 4:12 he is able to save and to destroy. That is a very solemn statement.

Hebrews seven tells us he is able to save to the uttermost. The words “to the uttermost” simply mean to the very end. He is able to save to the end them that come unto God by Jesus Christ.

When he saves them Jude tells us he is able to keep them from falling.

Paul said, writing to Timothy, 2 Timothy 1:12, he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.

He wrote to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians eight verse nine that he is able to make all grace abound to you. Whatever you need. There is grace.

Acts 20 tells us that he is able to build his people up.

Hebrews two tells us he is able to help them when they are tempted.

Romans 14:4 says that you are not to judge a brother because he is standing before God. These are in matters of indifference. You are not to lord over it over the conscience of another for God is able to make him stand. I think that is a wonderful text. He is able.

Then in Ephesians we are told in chapter three verse 20 he is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think. He is able to answer prayer.

⁷ Isaiah 59:1.

Verse 21, often overlooked says that he is able to do it according to the power that worketh in us.

He is able to do it and to subdue all things unto himself. This is what he is able to do.

He is able to save the Jews according to Romans 11:23. He is able to graft them in.

Now when you look at this—he is able to save, he is able to destroy, he is able to keep, he is able to deliver, he is able to make grace abound, he is able to support, he is able to make you stand, he is able for any situation. What is that telling you?

He has lost none of his ancient power.

I have often quoted you the... what my friend, my late friend Jordan Conn said to a know all sort of a Christian who told him he didn't believe that the power of Pentecost—and Jordan Conn was not a Pentecostalist. He was not a Charismatic. He did not get into their excesses and their perversions of the New Testament gifts, but Jordan Conn knew the fullness of the Holy Ghost with mighty power and he saw God do what to us would be almost incredible things.

When this guy came to him and said he didn't believe that that power was available to the people of God today, Conn just looked at him. And I wish some of you may remember him. I wish you could see this six foot two Indian with eyes as black as coal and they burned like coal and blazed into his character and he just looked him through and through and he said, "When you, like the early Church, when you have spent 10 days in prayer before God for the power of the Holy Ghost, then come and tell me there is no power available to God's people."

This is a refuge of lives. This is what happens when people who are more interested in other things and they don't spend the time and they don't put in the effort and they are not willing to die to self to seek the power of the Holy Ghost, they glibly say, "Oh, the day in which we live is a day in which there is no such power."

But I want to tell you, my friend, our God is the same. Jesus Christ is the same and our Savior has lost none of his ancient power.

But—and here is the fly in the ointment—but according to verses nine through 11 of what we read tonight, according to our text there are times when the Lord does not answer prayer and there are times when the Lord does not move with power. There are times when there is no apparent deliverance for the people of God and for the Church of Christ. That is implicit in our text, especially in verse two. It is explicit when we come to verse nine.

Listen carefully.

Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men. We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves: we look for judgment, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far off from us.⁸

That is a day of what Habakkuk calls the hiding of God's power. Oh, yes, he has done great things. We have to say with the psalmist in Psalm 44, "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old."⁹

I have read the book of Acts. I have read the histories of revival. I have read the stories of the mighty movings of God. I have heard it from others who have seen it. But today is the hiding of God's power. And in a day when they hatch cockatrice eggs and weave the spider's web, when the devices of the wicked break out like a plague upon the land and throughout the professing Church, in a time when more than ever before we needed to know by experience the reality of the mighty power of God to intervene, in a day when hell is let loose upon the earth, when Satan has at his disposal everything apparently that would deceive men, would take our very offspring, our sons and our daughters and cut them off from truth, drive them into the darkness to damn their souls eternally, in a day when ever as never before we needed the power of God, there is a hiding of God's power. We are groping like blind men. We are crying for light, but we are surrounded by obscurity. We are pleading for deliverance, but it is far from us.

There are times that I think we don't need a preacher to prove we are living in such a time. We are living in such a generation and the Lord, as far as these great movements of his Spirit is concerned, is not answering prayer. He is not moving with mighty power.

Oh, I am aware of the people who say we have been living in revival for 30 years. They have had the rain and then they have had the later rain and they have got all sorts of things that charlatans have dreamed up and imposed upon gullible minds. You are seeing what man can do to simulate revival. But the reality is conspicuous by its absence.

Now we come to the part that hurts. The reason for this spiritual poverty lies in the backsliding of God's people. God says, "My arm is not shortened, my ear is not heavy. I can still do all that the Word of God says."

"But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear."¹⁰

Go down to verse 11. As I say, "We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves: we look for judgment, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far off from us."¹¹

⁸ Isaiah 59:9-11.

⁹ Psalm 44:1.

¹⁰ Isaiah 59:2.

Why?

“For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions are with us; and as for our iniquities, we know them.”¹²

Now let me just stop there. I am not going to go on a fishing expedition. I am not going to go around as too many preachers do saying, “If there is something in you,” have all sorts of little tricks and it always works out that the sincerest and the godliest of people go home tied up in knots. Maybe there is something in me that is holding back the blessing of God. Maybe there is something.

I am not talking in maybes. The prophet is not addressing unknown sin. He says we know them. We know them.

Now what I am going to ask you to do tonight as we are here in God’s house in God’s presence if you are a Christian, is to open your heart and your soul before God and his Word .

Lord, I am not here tonight to judge my brother’s sin. I am not here tonight to understand another’s heart. But I am here honestly before God to say, “Lord, I know my own sin.” I know the things in me that are holding back my own experience of the power and the blessing of God. I know my own thing, my own sin, my own corruption, my own backsliding. Oh, I can hide it from the world. I can shut it off from human view. But when I get alone with God, if I get alone with God...

Ah, there is the rub. There is the rub. Are there not Christians here tonight and it is a distant memory, really getting alone with God. I am not talking about having your devotions. Now, forgive the sarcasm that sounds in that, but I get so sick of these little phrases that cover up spiritual impotence and the backslidden spirit. Oh, if having your devotions means what the words really import, that you get alone with God and there is spirit of devotion, there is a spirit of real personal communion with God, then I am all for you having your devotions. But, oh, men and women, I am—and I am sure you are, too—I am all together too aware that there are people, Christians and they use the phrase, but there is little devotion. There is little fire. There is little real entering in to the holy place of God. There is little opening of the heart. There is little searching of the soul. There is little business being done with God.

There is the rub.

Have you got alone with God today? Have you really got alone with God in the last week? Come on, now. Let’s have no nonsense, no lying hypocrisies before God. What about the last month? Has there been a time when you have got alone with God genuinely to do business with him?

¹¹ Isaiah 59:11.

¹² Isaiah 59:12.

Men and women, I want to tell you we know our sins. But when we do get alone with God and open up our hearts to him, let me tell you, we know the things that hold us back.

You don't have to go out of this place tonight saying, "Oh, if, but, perhaps, is there something?"

I know that there is such a thing as examining your own soul. But I do not believe our God is in the business of playing little mind games with us. I believe if there is that which is holding you back, if there is that—it may be that you are in the victory. Hallelujah! Keep going on with God. Keep short accounts with him. But if you are not, if you are not, you get with God and I guarantee there will be no if, there will be no but, there will be no maybe. You will be able to say, "As for our iniquities, we know them; In transgressing and lying against the LORD."¹³

My Jesus I love thee, I know thou art mine.

You do? You really do? You haven't prayed in a week or a month or in six months or a year with any passion.

My Jesus I love thee, but the Bible sits closed as Spurgeon said, gathering dust that you could take your finger and trace the words damnation on its cover.

"Lying against the Lord... uttering from the heart words of falsehood."¹⁴

This is the reason.

I think of us individually. I think of us as a church. We have no room, no reason to be proud. Sometimes when God brings you into a knowledge, for example, of the doctrines of grace, you enter into the knowledge of a great freedom of justification and acceptance with God through Jesus Christ in union with him that you are clothed with his righteousness and you have that righteous merit of the Lord Jesus imputed to you so that you live now by grace through faith and not by guilt through fear. When that gets home to you it revolutionizes you. But after a while you know you can become so self complacent that you are so proud that I now know this, so proud we now feel this.

Well, glory to God we know it. But, men and women, let me tell you that only increases our responsibility before God.

If I know this, then how am I to live. If I have this freedom why am I in bondage?

Men and women, we have got to face the fact our backsliding as a church will do more to hinder our work for God than anything anybody outside this church can do against us. It is here in our fellowship, in our homes, in our secret closets. It is here that we are either

¹³ Isaiah 59:12-13.

¹⁴ Isaiah 59:13.

going to blaze a trail for God and prove God or we are going to fall flat in total failure. And it is no good blaming the devil. And it is no good blaming the world. And it is no good blaming the politicians or the gay and lesbians and all the rest of it. They need God to deal with them, but I tell you our work will go with power and blessing if we have the power and the blessing of God, if we get through to God and nobody can stop it.

But if we don't there is nobody can get it going.

I think of Isaiah 64. After the great prayer, "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down,"¹⁵ oh that God would visit us with revival. He has to confess, "But we are," verse six, "all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses..."¹⁶

Do you know what they are? Our righteousnesses, those are saying our prayers, reading our Bible, sitting in church, getting to the prayer meeting. Oh, those are all wonderful things, but if they are only a cloak to cover a heart that has departed wickedly from the living God, they are the righteousnesses that are as filthy rags.

He says:

We all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, [notice the words] because of our iniquities.¹⁷

What I am saying to you tonight is not a pleasant thing either to preach or to listen to, but it is very biblical.

Isaiah 58 verse one says, "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins."¹⁸

That is God's command.

Let me be very, very blunt. The backslidings of God's people have terrible consequences. Truth falls in the street. When the Church loses out with God the ramifications are felt throughout society.

Now I am not one of those preacher who want to heap the guilt upon godly people for all the filthiness that is happening in the nation. But I do say this and let me back up. I am not, therefore, going to say that if this congregation really, sincerely goes through with God that we will see America changed overnight or even over the next 10 years. I can't promise that. What I can say, however, is that in the Church of Jesus Christ there has been such a prolonged backsliding from truth, such a prolonged backsliding from

¹⁵ Isaiah 64:1.

¹⁶ Isaiah 64:6.

¹⁷ Isaiah 64:6-7.

¹⁸ Isaiah 58:1.

holiness in the Church of Jesus Christ where professing Christians take sin lightly where preachers are among the most filthy hypocrites in the country. Now I am not generalizing. That is not true of most preachers, I am sure. But nonetheless we have these high profile cases of vile men, filthy men, immoral men, thieving men, murderous men and they have occupied the pulpit, adulterers in the pulpit, thieves in the pulpit, child molesters in the pulpit and my it gets big coverage when professing Christians play fast and loose with sin and they have such a little view of the holiness of God. Is it any wonder that truth falls in the street? Is it any wonder that in the public square there is no feeling of fear of a holy God and there is no hatred of sin?

We can blame the government all we like. But God says, “Shew my people their transgressions.”¹⁹

There are great consequences for the nation. There are great consequences for the Church as Revelation chapters two and three make clear and time does not permit me to go into them, those churches that God had something against, the consequence of continuing with sin and backsliding were terrible. It will wreck a church. It will snuff out the candlestick. That is a terrible, terrible prospect. It happened in Ephesus, perhaps one of the greatest churches the world has ever seen. God blew out the candle, snuffed out the flame.

Oh, the church continued. I have no doubt for a long time they had their meetings. They had their collections. They had their programs. But God was gone.

And then, of course, there are consequences in the home, consequences in the home.

I listened to the great tennis star—great in the sense of skilful—not to be admired in most other ways, tennis star John McEnroe and he was asked what has changed in your life since those days when you were the brat on the tennis courts of the world?

And he said, “Well, you get, I suppose, a little more mature as you get older.” But he said, “The most sobering thing was having children. And you see this beautiful little life come into the world and you have the responsibility to rear it and to guide it.” In his opinion to make it a decent person.

As Christians we have got to look a whole lot further than that. When that little life comes into the world to nurture it, to guide it, to teach it, to lead it, to see it saved.

Tell my people about their transgressions because backsliding among the people of God is a destructive and a damning force in their families.

Black picture and yet there is hope.

It is a hope that lies in the sovereign grace of God because the Lord says, “I am wondering there is no man.”

¹⁹ Isaiah 58:1.

You look at this situation. Why is the church prayer meeting not filled? The Lord says, "I wonder at that."

You know, if the Bible didn't say that I would think it blasphemous for me to say it. God wondering? But that is the language he uses.

I am looking at a Wednesday and look at the country, it is the way to the devil. Look at the Church. It is the way to the devil. Look at our families. They are under attack. Look at our young people, we are losing them left right and center. Look at the great mass of the unsaved and we are having little or no effect on them. I looked at this situation and I wonder where are my people when it comes to the place of prayer? Where are my people when it comes to the time to get alone with God and do business for eternity? I wonder. Where on earth are God's people?

And I think he has every right to wonder.

I wonder where you will be in prayer meeting time. I wonder where you will be in that hour of the day when you should be alone with God, when you should be opening your heart and your mind and your soul to God in his Word. Where will you be? Where have you been?

God says, "I wonder that there was no intercessor."

But yet despite that he said he put on righteousness as a breastplate. He will put on the helmet of salvation. And he will step forth for the deliverance of his people to defeat the enemy. He says when the enemy comes in like a flood the Spirit of Lord will lift up a standard against him. God is going to work in his Church. That is his promise.

But he uses means.

This working is a work of grace. It is, as verse 20 makes clear though the merits and work of the redeemer. What a day when that happens when the Redeemer comes to his Zion.

But notice to whom he comes. To them that turn from transgression in Jacob.

In other words, there is a remnant who truly seek after God. The Lord says, "I am going to come to those people. I am going to come to them."

There is a people who are powerless, but they fell it. There is a people who have failed God and they hate their failure. There is a people that identify their sin. We know them. But they have turned from those transgressions to seek after God.

And the Lord says, "I will come to those people."

There is mercy with the Lord. There is forgiveness with him that he may be feared. There is grace to restore the most backslidden soul, the coldest in heart, the most defeated in life. There is a way back for every Christian.

“Repent,” as he said to the Ephesians in Revelation two, “And do the first works.”

Hosea says in chapter 10 and verse 12, “It is time to seek the Lord.”²⁰

Men and women, his hand is not shortened. He can still save. His ear is not heavy. He still hears and answers prayer. Our God is yet to do, has yet to do the greatest work of evangelism and grace that he has ever done since the days of the apostles. According to my Bible that is still before us. God has not finished working. And if we seek for him with all our hearts we will find him.

We know why revival tarries. No big mystery. We know why we have so little power with God individually and as a church. We know why so many of our lives are in such a mess. We know. No mystery. But listen. We also know if we seek him he will be found. We know the problem. We know the answer.

Let me leave you with a question. Can we live another day in separation from our God and from his blessing? Can we live another day in separation from our God and from his blessing?

The Lord can and the Lord will give us a gracious reviving when we simply, honestly seek him.

Let's bow together in prayer.

We want every head bowed. We do want every person and especially every Christian to be in an attitude of serious and honest seeking after God.

How is it with you tonight between you and the Lord? How is it? Are you saved? Or are you enduring that dreadful evil that Thomas Boston spoke about, being alienated from God by wicked works.

Man, woman, young person, it is time for you to be saved. It is time for you to seek the Lord. Seek him and you will find him.

Am I speaking to somebody here tonight and you could tell me when you were saved and where you were saved and how you were saved and how you went on with God and how God blessed you and God helped you and God honored you and God used you? But tonight you are far from him in a heart that is cold and defeated and bitter, angry. It is time to seek the Lord. It is time to get right with God.

²⁰ Hosea 10:12.

Backslider, there is room at the cross for you. There is restoring grace for you. I invite you to take the 51st Psalm. In fact, I plead with you to take it. Get on your knees before God. I have done it many and many and many a time. It is not a pleasant experience, but oh how needful. Go through that Psalm on your knees and cry to God, “Restore to me the joy of thy salvation.”²¹

The Lord’s hand is not short. He can still save. The Lord’s ear is open. He can still hear. Cry to him. He will lift up the standard against the evil and he will arise for our deliverance.

Why does revival tarry? We have got the answer. Now let’s go to the Lord and cry indeed on praying ground until he rains righteousness upon us.

If I can help you in the things of God I am here as your servant for Christ’s sake. If you would like to speak with Dr. Barrett or with me or with any of the elders or workers of the church we would be happy to open God’s Word and help you in these things of God.

Father in heaven, bless thy Word we pray. Make it solemn and searching. Make it, oh God, a Word of grace, a Word of blessing, a Word of conviction, but a Word to turn us to Christ, a Word that will turn our eyes upon Jesus to know the cleansing of his blood and the restoring that his Spirit alone can give. Lord, do this. Save the lost. Restore every backsliding heart. Start with my heart. Cleanse me, oh Lamb of God, cleanse me from sin. Grant that thou will do a deep and powerful work. We know our iniquities, our half heartedness, our lying hypocrisies, professing great things. But in reality denying them. God have mercy. Bless our hearts. Bless our homes. Bless our families. Bless our congregation and, oh Lord, through us bless our nation.

Truth has fallen in the streets. Gracious God, as the vipers break out all around us as thy Word has described, visit us. Visit us. Put on that breastplate of righteousness. Don that helmet of salvation. Pick up the sword of thy blessed Word. Oh, almighty God, come and arise. The enemy has come in like a flood. Lift up thy standard against him.

Part us with thy blessing. Keep us in thy fear and give fruit that will last for the preaching of thy Word we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

²¹ Psalm 51:12.