

Past, Present and Future

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Date: 19 November 2017

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- [0 : 0 0] Would you now turn with me to the Old Testament, please, to the book of Proverbs and the very first chapter of that book. Proverbs chapter 1.
- And we're going to break in to read and meditate from verse 24 to the end of that chapter. Proverbs chapter 1 and at verse 24.
- Let us read and hear God's word. Lord, because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hands and no man regarded.
- But ye have set at naught all my counsel and would have none of my reproof. I also will laugh at your calamity. I will mock when your fear cometh.
- When your fear cometh as a desolation and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind. When distress and anguish cometh upon you, then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer.
- [1 : 0 6] They shall seek me early, but they shall not find me. For that they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, they would none of my counsel.
- They despised all my reproof. Therefore, shall they eat of the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.
- But whoso harketh unto me shall dwell safely and shall be quiet from fear of evil. A question that you should have, maybe not decorating the wall in the kitchen, but decorating the memory in your mind.
- Just a simple question about your own lifestyle and mine. Like this. Who's going to have the last word? Who is going to have the last word in my life or in yours?
- That's what this passage is telling us about. The book of Hebrews tells us about the contrast between the Old and the New Testament. Where we have God in the Old Testament.
- [2 : 3 1] The demands of his character. The uniqueness of his dealings. The way in which there is that God, above all other gods, time and time again that attention is fixed upon him.
- As against all the other idols. And in chapter 12 of Hebrews we're told that God spoke at Sinai. And God has now spoken through his son.
- And what his death and shed blood represent. And if God spoke at Sinai.
- And we're told there that they weren't to come close to the mountain. And when God spoke there was going to be death. If anybody broke his commands or came close. There was a fear and a solemnity about God speaking in the day of Sinai.
- What happens now? As God has spoken through his own son. They needed care when he spoke at Sinai.
- [3 : 3 6] How we need so much more care now. To listen to what he is saying. When he spoke then the earth shook. When he speaks now.
- A lot more than the earth should shake. We gather here this morning. Every one of us in church. To listen to what God is saying to us.

What are we doing? With what he is saying. Come the end of the service and we go back to work tomorrow. Do we let what we've heard slip off our lives like water off a duck's back?

Or does it stick with us? Or have an effect upon us? Do we say normal service is renewed now? What happens to the things of eternity?

The challenge of the gospel. That we hear week after week from this pulpit and from others. Do they stay front and center in our life?

[4 : 46] Dominating us? Controlling us? If you think of your life as a rubber band. You stretch that rubber band out. And that's you Monday to Saturday. You're under pressure and you've got things to do.

The rubber band is stretched. But come five o'clock or six o'clock. Saturday or Sunday. The rubber band relaxes.

Goes back to its natural length. Our lives. When we go back to our natural habitat. What do we think about at six o'clock?

What do we think about on a Saturday? On a Sunday? Do the things of the gospel that we've heard stick with us? Or do they wash past us?

That's the question we have to ask constantly. There's a very searching question put by the Lord himself. In John's gospel chapter 12.

[5 : 51] He says this. Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while you have the light. Less darkness comes upon you.

And the question is. What are you going to do when the light is taken away? What are you going to do when the light is taken away? Things are shaking then.

Down in Fort William. Benavis is an old volcano. Sits on a very, very weak seismic fault line. Sometimes we have earthquakes.

One time in ten days. We had five of them. They weren't great. Just a wee trembling. Not many people noticed them.

And sometimes that's exactly what happens with the gospel when it's preached. There is just a little trembling. A little shaking. But the day is going to come. When the whole earth.

[6 : 54] And all humanity. Are going to be shaken. And what's going to happen then to you and to me. Our chapter this morning and our reading this morning.

Sets out for us the consequences of our lifestyle. The detailed consequences of the way we live.

Are clearly and plainly put before us there. And we have to look at them with a seriousness and a solemnity. And whatever else we do. And I say this quite seriously and solemnly with 40 years of ministry.

Whatever else we do. And whatever else you remember about two weeks of me being here. Let this at least be in the uppermost in your memory. Don't play around with God.

Don't play around with God. What does it matter? What God has said. Does he take notice of where I am and what I'm doing?

[8 : 06] If you go back to. I think it's 1 Kings chapter 16. And it says there. A man. And it's just one verse about one man called Hiel.

Hiel. And Hiel started to rebuild Jericho. Remember what God said when he put down the walls of Jericho.

You're not going to build them. And if you try it you're going to pay the consequences. And Hiel says well I'm going to take God on. I'm going to try that. And I'm going to rebuild these walls. And he did it.

And he lost one. Two. Members of his family. First born. Second born. And third born. Read the verse. It's one verse. Right at the very end of 1 Kings I think.

Chapter 16. Hiel is his name. And he thought he could take God on. And God didn't look. And God didn't count. Yes. Nothing could be further from the truth. God is not mocked.

[9 : 04] What we sow. We will reap. So. Who's going to have the last word? Don't play around with God. Let's get back to our text then.

This morning. Three simple thoughts I want to bring out of it for you. First of all I want us to think of past privileges. Then I want to think of present calamities.

Then I want to think of future consequences. So let's rewind back to the beginning of these three. And go to past privileges. I have called.

I have stretched out my hands. I have given you counsel. I have given you reproof.

Past privileges. That's what's mentioned here. We've got so much pressure. Like we were talking about a while ago with the children. There's so much pressure.

[10 : 04] Bearing down upon us to mold and to fashion our thinking and our living today. But there is one thing that we've got to carefully protect. And we've got to make sure that we keep it clear of any other infringement or any other distraction.

God has something to say to us. And don't let anything of our life smother it. He speaks to us.

He calls to us. And you and I together. Both of us. We have had so, so many past privileges.

We have had so, so many past privileges. But sometimes we dismiss them for another day. Wait till I'm older. Wait till I've done this.

Wait till I've gone there. Every single brick. Every single fact. Every single impression, testimony and experience that you've gathered in your life.

[11 : 09] In your Christian privileges. Are there. And waiting. And God is watching. What we will do with them.

There is a silence in heaven. In our service now. There is a silence in heaven.

As the gaze of God. And as the ear of God. Is bent towards every congregation. And you and me together.

And God is listening. And God is watching. What a response will be. To what he has said. And what he has done.

Past privileges. Let's take them out of the passages. We've got them there for us. First of all he says. I have called.

[12 : 15] I don't know what your experience has been. But let me try to. Tap into it. Just one particular strand. You think of the number of communion services.

Sunday evening communion services. You have had in this church. You think of the number of evangelistic services. You have heard. Here from other ministers at other times.

You think of how many different presentations of the gospel. I have called to you. When that happens.

God is getting close. And God is getting personal with us all. We all know the ABC of the gospel. We all know what is required of us.

What are we doing with it? God has presented it in different language. In different illustrations. He has come with so many different ways. Speaking to you. Calling to you. I have called.

- [13 : 16] Through a sermon. That doesn't exhaust God's way of calling. He says. I have called perhaps through providences. That have come upon you. Things that have happened to you.
- They look innocent to anyone else. Round about you. To a friend. Or to the family circle. That they look quiet. It's just. It's happened. But you know. You know very well.
- That that is God. Calling to you. In providence. He is drawing your attention. To something that you've been told. And that you've ignored. And he doesn't go silent.
- He just simply steps up the noise. And he speaks. And he speaks louder. And louder still. To get our attention.
- Yes. He speaks. To us in providence. He speaks to you and to me. In our conscience. God tells us.
- [14 : 21] What are you doing there? Stop for a moment and think. What are you doing? That. Is wrong. And he tells us that.
- That there are absolutes. That he operates by. And he imposes upon us. Rights and wrongs. Clear and unmistakable. They're not up for debate. And they're not grey areas.
- Black and white. He leaves us. And no doubt. It's there. He's been calling to us. And how often. We found ourselves. On the wrong side of the line. How often.
- Have we found ourselves. Straying across that line. And as we stray. The voice of God. Follows us. And he tells us. It's wrong. It's wrong. Past privileges.
- God has been calling to us. Not doing that. He tells us. I have done something else.
- [15 : 21] I have what? I have stretched out. My hands. What does that mean? Again.
- Just simply throw the words. And the experiences at you. I have stretched out my hands. With almighty help to you. Okay.
- You're in a hard place. And you're in a tight corner. You're in a deep hole. Not of your own making. Perhaps. Whatever it might be. You fill in the details yourself.
- But you don't know which way to go. And you don't know how to get out of it. And the Lord. And his grace. And his mercy. Has done just that very thing. For you and to you. And you've got out of it. I have stretched out my hands.
- Or God has blessed us. Because our lives. Can so often be. Shallow and fragile. And there's so little substance with us. All that we can do. When we gather our life together.
- [16 : 22] Is like a pile of beans. That's all it is. But into these pile of beans. From time to time. We've known the Lord's blessing. I have stretched out my hands upon you.
- And yet what's happened. We disregard it. And we dismiss it. We're content to live.
- In the shadow. Than live in the sunlight. We're content with meager rations. Than a full feast. God has stretched out his hands.
- And we've paid no heed to it. Third word. Past privileges. God says. I have given you counsel. They would have none of my counsel.
- Remember what we were thinking about last week. About being crag fast on the hill. And you had to find out a way of getting out of a difficult problem. And you needed wisdom to get out. God has given us wisdom and counsel. Time after time after time.
- [17 : 23] Has he not? Again. Look back over the diary of your life. And you'll find the wisdom. That we've got is totally inadequate. But God's wisdom has been saying. Take this step.
- Take that step. God's counsel has come clearly to us. We were singing about it. In Psalm 19. About the way in which. Our lives can be.

Can be guided by the. The counsels of God. But we disregard it. Because we think. We know better.

Let me give simply. One illustration. In the life of. The testimony rather of Jeremiah. Jeremiah chapter 6. We read at verse 16.

These words. Thus says the Lord. Stand ye at the ways. And see. And ask for the old paths. Where's the good way? And walk therein. And you shall find rest for your souls.

[18 : 24] What a prescription that gives us for life today. In our society. 21st society. Our nation with all its politics. Ask for the ways. Walk in them. And you shall find rest for your souls.

But the verse continues. But they said. We will not. Walk therein.

The counsel God gives. Disregarded. The fourth word that's given to us here. He says. What about my reproof?

They despised my reproof. Even when we've crossed the line. In the face of God's warnings. God does not fully and totally abandon us. There he gives us a degree of correction.

Something comes into your life. That shows you that it's wrong. He's correcting you. There in your sin. And yet even that correction.

[19 : 21] Sometimes we fail to pay heed to. We don't take it to heart. What I said then a moment ago.

Don't play around with God. It's not a safe thing to dismiss. What he's saying. Or what he's doing. In your life. Or in mine. We can be at the crossroads.

We can face a decisive moment. We're alone. We've got privileges. What are we doing with them?

So then. That's it. Past privileges. But we've got to move on. And the second thing I said. We should see here. Present. Present calamities.

The boot is now on the other foot. The focus now is not upon God. What he's done. The focus is now upon man. I will laugh at your calamities.

[20 : 29] I will mock when your fear comes. When your fear comes as destruction. And destruction as a whirlwind. We're now in the frame.

You and me. Something happens. Whatever it is. Calamity strikes. Something breaks into your life. It's different in detail from you, me and all the rest of us.

But it all has the same effect. It's something with a spiritual lesson and application and challenge. We're shaken. We're rocked. We're helpless. And again in that calamity.

There are four simple words given us. The first one. Fear. Fear. When your fear comes. Something bigger than ourselves and beyond our capacities.

It could be something physical. It could be something physical. But we would prefer to think of something spiritual. When the thought of eternal realities breaks into your thinking.

[21 : 36] When the rubber band relaxes back at five o'clock in the night time. And you begin to think about. Am I right with God? What have I done with what the minister told me on Sunday?

What about what my mom and my dad's prayers were for me? All of these things have an effect and sometimes they can make us afraid.

Scared of meeting God. Scared of meeting God without being prepared and without any protection. And nowhere to hide.

Yes there is a fear. You dare not speak about it to anyone else. But perhaps it's in your heart right now. In your soul right now. There's an echo of it right now.

The present calamity that comes. Fear. He moves on and he speaks not only about fear. But he speaks about destruction. When fear comes there's a desolation upon you.

[22 : 43] It's not something that comes on the edge of your life. You know. A whirlwind that just simply. You get the tail end of the wind. Breezing against and across your life. No. That's not what he's talking about.

He's talking about this. Right at the eye of the storm. With all of the intensity of it coming to bear upon your life. That's what you've got. Total ruin.

Not just physically. But spiritually. And it can produce distress. And it can produce anguish. Of spirit.

Let me quote. The experience.

We're all familiar with it. Was it Nebuchadnezzar? No it wasn't. It was Belshazzar. He had. Nebuchadnezzar. He went and he had a party. And he was going to have a party with over a thousand guests.

[23 : 42] And he wanted some vessels to use to drink at the party. So what did he do was he sent. Well let's get the vessels that I took from Israel. Let's get me the vessels I took from Jerusalem.

The holy vessels. And he used these vessels to use as a party drink. Daniel chapter 5. And as the party was in full swing.

God broke in. God broke in. And there was the finger that wrote upon the wall. And Daniel and Belshazzar.

Nebuchadnezzar was in distress. And in chapter 5 and verse 6. We are told that his knees were knocking together. That's how scared and afraid he was.

Of meeting God. Without any preparation. Or protection. In a moment. In a split second.

[24 : 48] So much changed for him. And so much changed for us. What did he do?

What happens here in this calamity that's given to us in Proverbs. They shall call upon me. Anybody that was taught in Israel.

Anybody that's been taught in the free church or going to church these days. We all know. About the place of prayer. But the astonishing thing here is that this is a prayer the Lord does not hear.

That's frightening. That should cause us real concern. Here was a prayer that was too selfish.

There wasn't the dependence and the trust and the reliance on the Lord behind it. It wasn't a regular path of dependence on the Lord that was this person's path and habit in life.

[25 : 57] No. When the calamity comes. It goes like this. Lord I'm in a mess. Get me out of it. The same as the people.

Remember the one thief on the cross. Come down to the cross and save yourself. And us. A prayer that the Lord does not hear.

I'm in a mess. Get me out of it. The Lord is not a servant. To be summoned only as we feel our need.

And as we want something. But we hold at arm's distance all the rest of the time. No. That's not the way the Lord has a relationship with his people.

There has to be that total commitment. That full consecration to him. When we call upon the Lord. It's not just simply for self-interest.

[27 : 01] The mess I'm in and I want out. There has to be first and foremost the seeking. Forgiveness and pardon for my soul. And the Lord as my Lord and my Savior.

So therefore in this calamity. There's a strict logic comes into operation. Logic just like this.

The Lord is saying to these people. You laughed. You laughed when I spoke to you. You dismissed what I had to say. So the Lord is now simply paying these people back in their own coin.

What goes around comes around. I'm not going to listen now. When you come to me. If we have treated the Lord with such disdain and dismissed everything he said.

Until the very last moment. We've got to be careful about the logic. Of what the Lord is saying to us here. Confusion.

[28 : 17] And chaos. Coming upon it. No matter how earnest we might be. Oh yes. He speaks here about early seeking him. That's the way of saying that earnestness. Of seeking him.

But the answer is the same. A deafening silence. We've got to be careful. How we deal with God. We can.

We must not. Trifle with him. Let's go on. Because I want to reach the final point.

Yes we've passed. Privileges. Present calamities. What about future consequences? Justice demands it.

Logic demands it. We've seen it here. Let me just use one illustration. To bring it home. It's an illustration from the life of.

[29 : 13] Saul. In 1st Kings. Chapter 28. We have this. When Saul saw the host of the Philistines. He was afraid. And his heart. Greatly trembled. And when Saul. Inquired. Of the Lord. The Lord. Answered him not. And when you go down. To verse 18. Of that chapter. Samuel said. To Saul.

Why hast thou disquieted me. To bring me up. Sorry. Verse 14. I have no reference.

Verse 18. Of that same chapter. My apologies. Why did all this happen to Saul? Because thou obeisest not. The voice of the Lord.

[30 : 20] Nor executed his fierce wrath. Against Amalek. Therefore hath the Lord. Done this thing. Unto thee. This day. When you go back. To chapter 15.

Of 1st Samuel. You find there. That Saul was told. Destroy them all. And Samuel came. And he says. Wait a minute. Why am I heaving. The bleeding of sheep? Why am I heaving.

The bleeding of sheep? And Saul turns. And he says. Well I kept the best. For ourselves. For the Lord. And there. Samuel turns. And he says to Saul. To obey.

Is better than sacrifice. To obey. Is better than sacrifice. That's what the Lord. Was looking for. From Saul. And he didn't give it. And there's the lesson.

For ourselves. We've got to obey. What the Lord. Asks and requires. Of us also. Spurgeon. Spurgeon.

[31 : 17] Was in London. Years ago. In the midst. Of a cholera epidemic. On a Monday morning. At three o'clock. In the morning. Somebody came.

To his door. And he was asked. To visit. A dying man. He went. And there. The man. Lay down. With only moments. Left to him. All the day long.

All his years. That man. Had mocked. Spurgeon. And his message. All the day long. He had cheered him. And made fun of him. And yet.

When death came. He called. For the minister. It wasn't. For a spiritual thing. It was a superstitious thing. But it was too late.

He had mocked. The gospel. He had mocked. The servant. There was no space left. For him. For repentance. And make his peace with God.

[32 : 18] The future consequences. Now I know. I know. That some will say. But what about. An eleventh hour conversion.

Yes. I'm not discounting that. But I'm not going to leave anybody comfortable waiting for that. And the best way of making it sure and plain and clear to every one of us.

Is to think of the cross. Of Calvary. The Lord was in the middle. And there were two thieves. One on each side. They both had the same privileges. We've mounted on the privileges this morning.

They both had the same privileges. They both came underneath the same calamity. But only one of them was saved.

Don't put off. Don't play around. Don't delay. Because you don't know what the future holds for you.

[33 : 19] The conference is set up for us here. At the end of this chapter. There are those. Who turn away.

And very simply. There's no remedy for them. But there are those who hearken. Who listen. And they shall be quiet. From fear of evil.

Amen. Amen. Amen. In April 1912.

The impossible happened. The Titanic sailed on its maiden voyage. It was deemed to be an unsinkable ship. But at twenty past two on that morning it sank.

Four days out from Southampton. No expense spared. To make it the finest journey. And everything went well until that Sunday. When they sailed into an ice field. They had forewarnings.

[34 : 17] Other ships that were in the ice. They ignored all of these warnings. Some warnings didn't even reach the bridge. But at eleven o'clock that night.

Especially. Another boat to California. Ten miles away. Gave them a direct warning. That they were entering large field of ice. The radio officer was tired.

He'd been all day transferring messages to America. And he says. Shut up. Shut up. I'm busy. Forty minutes later.

The Titanic had ice. And within hours. One thousand five hundred. And the ship. Were lost. If we ignore what God is saying.

There are consequences. Fear for consequences. For our lives. Consequences far more serious. Than the loss of a ship.

[35 : 14] We read there. Hebrews chapter three. Verse seven. Today. If you will hear his voice.

Harden. Not your hearts. He is speaking to every one of us. In words. Illustrations. And figures. That can identify with every one of us.

And he's coming with the same challenge. And with the same message. And he's calling us to himself. We have privileges. Calamities will come.

What will be the consequence. When the day of reckoning comes for every one of us. Today. Today. If we hear his voice. As he calls. Let us turn.

And trust in him. We know not. What span of days. Is left to us. We know not. What privileges will yet be ours.

[36 : 19] Remember. After all. What the Lord says. What you do. When the light. Is removed. We dare not wait.

And wait. And wait. Today. Is the day of salvation. For you. And for me. Let us pray.