

Sunday Evening Service - Return to the Lord

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Date: 17 February 2013

Preacher: Rev I Watson

[0 : 00] We bow in prayer. Our loving God and our Father in heaven, as we turn to your word now, we admit that we are dependent upon you, wholly dependent upon you, Lord, without you, this word is a closed word, this book is a closed book.

Ah, but Lord, when you are gracious and merciful and you open the eyes of a man or a woman to see the riches that are here and to realize that this is not the words of men but the words of God, then something miraculous happens, something wonderful, something supernatural happens. And it is indeed our prayer tonight, dear Lord, that you would be pleased to speak to us and to work on us, to take us, to make us, to mold us, to shape us, that we may better reflect the nature and character of our Savior, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.

Amen. Amen. I'm going to begin this evening with a quotation from Shakespeare. I hope it's not too late in the evening for that.

It's from Henry V, Act 4, Scene 3. The English are about to do battle with the French at Agincourt, and the king is sacking up his troops.

[1 : 45] It's a speech where he talks about we few, we happy few, we band of brothers. He says to them, And gentlemen in England now obeyed shall think themselves accursed they were not here, and hold their manhoods cheap whilst any speaks that fought with us upon St. Crispian's Day.

It's all rousing stuff. Well, friends, I want to tell you tonight that whenever I read about revivals, whenever I read about revivals in Scotland, revivals of the past, like canvas lying and shorts, I think myself accursed that I was not there.

I listen to stories about revivals on this island, for example. I listen to them with a holy jealousy.

Now, I have on my bookshelves at home a copy of the book by the Peckhams, Colin Peckham and his wife, Sounds from Heaven. Maybe it's a book that many of you too will have.

My copy is an autographed copy because Colin signed it when he came and visited us in Kirkmoor Hill to speak about it. And one of the personal testimonies in that book is by a man called Donald McPhail from Barvis.

[3 : 15] He went on to be a missionary in the Middle East. Now, he was at the BTI, the Bible Training Institute, with my father. And he used to visit us when he was home on furlough.

He was a giant man, a giant of a man, physically as well as spiritually. But a more gentle man you could not find. And let me tell you, there was an aura about that man which even as a child I could recognize.

He was the product of a revival. When it comes to conversions, we are living in a day and age when it's the ones and the twos. Well, in this country anyway, do we not long for the hundreds?

Do we not long for the hundreds? We see it happening in other countries, the thousands, in China, in other parts of Asia, in Africa, in Brazil, but not here.

Not here. Now, I know that I am not alone in this longing and this desire. In fact, such is our desire for revival that a veritable industry has arisen around the subject of revival.

[4 : 37] Revival has become a marketable product. Now, at the more respectable end of the spectrum, there are serious books that examine the history of revivals.

These are books that excite us and inspire us. They put logs on the fire of our desire. But at the other end of the spectrum, there are those authors and preachers who claim to have found the secret formula for making revivals happen.

And like the alchemists of old, they claim that they can turn a dull and leaden landscape into a golden field of Holy Spirit activity.

And many have been taken in by them. And let me tell you, many have been disappointed. Friends, like you, I long for revival.

I long for personal revival. I long for ecclesiastical revival. I long for national revival. Now, last year in our services in Kirkmere Hill and our evening services, we've been going through the book of 1 Samuel.

[5 : 50] We're now on to 2 Samuel. I want to ask you, are you aware of when in history the events of 1 Samuel took place?

Do you have any concept of when in history these events were taking place? It was more than 3,000 years ago. More than 3,000 years ago, 1,000 years before the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is a long time ago, friends. That is the period in history that is known as the Iron Age. Did you know that? This is the Iron Age.

Now, can you imagine that? That we in Kirkmere Hill and we tonight, that we have been studying the lives and times of a small group of Iron Age men and women.

Can you think of anything stranger in the 21st century? Anything stranger than the 21st century men and women believe they can actually learn something from the Iron Age.

[7 : 04] But do you know what? Do you know what? Week after week, as we went through 1 Samuel and as we're going through 2 Samuel, we're astonished.

We are astonished. Because week after week, we meet ourselves here. We meet ourselves. We meet ourselves in all our weaknesses, in all our fears, in all our frailties.

And do you know who else we meet? we meet our God here. We meet our Lord Jesus Christ here. Now let me tell you something about the state of the nation of Israel, 1,000 years or so before Christ.

Israel was in a state of spiritual decline and moral bankruptcy. You just turn back one page and you'll see the very first verse of chapter 3 where it says, Now the young man Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli and the word of the Lord was rare in those days.

There was no frequent vision. the word of the Lord was rare. Now that's not a Glasgow rare. That is rare.

[8 : 40] Seldom. Hardly ever. Point of contact with 21st century Scotland. Point of contact.

The word of the Lord was rare. friend of mine was telling me about his sister's church. And this would be a church which has a very good name as being evangelical and which certainly in the past has been pastored by much sought after ministers.

But the present pastor seems to put more time into producing a PowerPoint presentation to illustrate his sermon than he does into the sermon itself.

And the comment from my friend's sister was that she spends all week looking at PowerPoint presentations at work. Presentations which are a whole lot better than what she sees at church. When she comes to church she wants to hear God's word preached. Preachers have lost faith in the word of God and they feel they have to decorate it with all sorts of ribbons and bows to make it more attractive.

[9 : 52] But the problem is the decorations are hiding the word of God. Iron Age Israel, 21st century Scotland, the word of the Lord was rare.

And here's another point of contact. The spiritual leadership was corrupt at worst and well at best ineffective.

And in 1st Samuel chapter 2 we read about Eli's sons and how they abused the sacrificial system and even slept with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

Hophni and phineus. Hophni and phineus. Wicked men they are called. Wicked men who had no regard for the Lord.

Oh dear. Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. That has such a 21st century ring about it, doesn't it? And I really don't need to say any more, do I?

[10 : 59] And what makes it all the more painful is the lack of willingness to tackle sin among our spiritual leaders. As with old Eli, there's a lot of sweeping under the carpet going on.

Friends, all I ask tonight is that nobody points a finger at any one denomination. I know enough about the church in Scotland to know that sin amongst our spiritual leaders is not confined to the church of Scotland.

And if they are the ones who are supposed to be our examples of holiness, why are we surprised at the state of the nation? It's no wonder that the people of Israel were religiously confused.

We read in chapter 4 about how they treated the Ark of the covenant as some kind of good luck charm as they went into battle with the Philistines. But the Lord wasn't willing to play ball.

And in our reading tonight in chapter 7 verses 3 and 4, we discover that they've been worshipping foreign gods, the Baals and the Ashteroth. And why are we surprised at the spiritual state of our nation?

[12:19] Why are we surprised that marriage is under attack? Why are we surprised that the cases of sexually transmitted diseases is on the rise? Why are we surprised at the greed and the materialism of the age?

Not long ago, I heard a high court judge being interviewed on the radio talking about how the breakdown in marriages has reached epidemic proportions and is having a devastating effect on our society.

But he said, this is what the judge said, he said he didn't want to preach. He wasn't on a moral crusade. All he wanted to do was bring it to our attention. Hello?

We've been saying this for years, for decades. Iron age Israel, 21st century Scotland. Is there any hope?

Is there any hope? Was there hope for Israel? Because if there was hope for Israel, maybe, just maybe, there will be hope for us.

[13:27] So what I want to do this evening is to show you from scripture how things changed in Israel. Am I offering a formula for revival?

No, I'm not. I simply want to show you a biblical situation which describes how God prepared his people for revival or for reformation, if you prefer, and to suggest to you that at the very least this is something we can learn from.

Preparation for reformation. Preparation for reformation. The people of Israel are at a spiritual low. And nothing epitomized this more than the fate of the Ark of the Covenant.

Captured by the Philistines, you remember how they placed it in the temple of their god Dagon? But the Lord God can never be anybody's prisoner. And he has forced the Philistines to return his Ark to Israel through that series of plagues and curses which befell each city into which the Ark was taken. So chapter 7 verse 2 tells us that the Ark had remained for 20 years in Kiriath Jerim. And here is where we are given our first point, our first work of preparation for reformation.

[15:03] We read here at the very end of verse 2, And all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.

All the house of Israel lamented after the Lord. They had almost lost the Ark of the Covenant for good. And of course to their minds if they lost the Ark, they'd lost the Lord.

And the more they considered this, the more they thought about this, the more they pondered on what might have happened, the more they moaned, the more they lamented, the more they sought the Lord.

Friends, sin makes losers of us all. Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit in the garden, they lost paradise.

More than that, they lost intimate fellowship with the Lord God. Every step towards sin takes us a step further away from the Lord, and not just the Lord.

[16:11] Abraham lied and he almost lost his wife Sarah. He told the Egyptians that she was his sister, not his wife. Our Lord's parable of the prodigal son illustrates the point so well.

There's the lad, jealously watching the pigs eating their food, and he thinks of how well off his father's servants are. He had lost not only his inheritance, he had lost his fairweather friends, he had lost the love and security of home.

Sin makes losers of us all, even as Christians, when we sin, we're losers. We lose our peace, we lose our joy, we lose our comfort, we lose our sense of security in Christ, the assurance that we're truly his.

I can imagine godly Israelites, like Samuel's father, Elkanah, godly Israelites who would have been so ashamed of their nation.

They were the people whom the living God had liberated from slavery in Egypt and had brought them into the promised land. And these blessings were not just historical. It wasn't that long ago that the Lord had raised up heroes like Gideon and Samson to lead them in victory against their enemies.

[17:30] How could they be so ungrateful? How could such a people with such blessings even contemplate worshipping other gods?

things? But are we so different? We who can rejoice in the glorious truth that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus?

The hymn writer says when I survey the wondrous cross in which the prince of glory died, my riches gain I count but loss and poor contempt and all my pride.

Do you ever survey the wondrous cross in your mind as it were in your meditation? Do you ever survey the cross, that blood stained cross?

Because I tell you friends if you did you'd be ashamed to sin. You'd be ashamed to sin, ashamed to gossip, ashamed to backbite, ashamed of our uncharitable thoughts, ashamed of our pride, too ashamed to yield to the temptation, too ashamed to give in to the devil.

[18 : 51] Friends, I am suggesting tonight there can be no revival, be it personal, in a congregation, in a nation, there can be no revival, until we understand the diabolical implications of our sin.

I think of that crowd of pilgrims on the day of Pentecost. Remember how Peter's sermon reaches its climax, therefore let all Israel be assured of this, God has made this Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ, and how does the crowd react when the penny drops as to what they had done, that they had crucified their Messiah?

when the people heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the other apostles, brothers, what shall we do?

Cut to the heart, they mourned, they lamented, they sought the Lord. The first work of preparation is a realization of the consequences of our sin, of how it makes losers of us all, people.

That's the first one. Here's the second one, and I see the second work in the Philistines themselves, in the Philistines. You see, the Lord disciplines those whom he loves.

[20 : 28] The living God is a better father than Eli ever was. Eli thought he was loving his sons by indulging them. There's another point of contact with 21st century Scotland.

Eli thought he was loving his sons by indulging them. Actually, his indulgence was a death sentence. What does Hebrews chapter 12 tell us, the seventh verse?

Endure hardship as discipline. God is treating you as sons, and the Lord has an end result in mind. ultimately, that we should be like Jesus, that we should produce a harvest of righteousness and peace. Now, almost certainly, that process will involve mourning for sin, and seeking after God. This is what the result of the Philistines' domination produced. They dominated Israel. And look what verse 7 says, Now, when the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel.

[21 : 44] It looks to them like a rebellion. Well, that's exactly what it is. The Israelites are preparing to break free from Philistine oppression. They had had enough.

That's why Samuel promises them in verse 3 that if they rid themselves of their foreign gods, the Lord would deliver them from the hand of the Philistines. When we are going through a hard time, when you are going through a trying time, dear brother or sister in Christ, be sure that the Lord has something for you to learn.

And that might, that might include facing up to your sin. we need to ask the Lord like Job.

Job chapter 10 verse 2, I will say to the Lord, do not condemn me, but tell me what charges you have against me. We have to pray that prayer like Job.

Now with Israel it was obvious. They had mixed the worship of the Lord God Almighty with the worship of false gods, their Baals, their asterisks. might there be a particular sin that you have become an expert in covering up.

[23 : 09] You remember the story in Joshua chapter 7, where Achan took some of the plunder from Jericho, which was supposed to be completely given over to the Lord.

He buried it in the ground, underneath his tent. How good are you at hiding your sin, your pride and your lust and your lukewarm faith, your hypocrisy?

You have one mask for the Lord's day and another for every other day of the week. Proverbs 28 verse 13, He who conceals his sins, does not prosper.

But whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy. Friends, sin is like one of those loan sharks. You know those loan sharks that prey on people's poverty?

You know, they lend you money as if they're your best friend, but the interest rate is extortionate. And the payback for a few hundred pounds might be several thousand pounds.

[24 : 30] Sin will offer you pleasure. Sin will offer you enjoyment. The repayment is hellish.

Worshipping Baal may have been a lot of fun. Well, I suppose any religion that's centred on sex is bound to be. But the payback, defeat, humiliation, gods that cannot hear or speak or see.

The second work of preparation was the Lord's discipline. The Lord's discipline on Israel. The Israelites groaned under the oppression of the Philistines.

But things changed when the groaning became mourning. And it became mourning for sin.

Friends, I pray for the day when the people of Scotland will wake up and see that their sin, their materialism, their promiscuity, rather than leading them into this wonderful new life of freedom that they imagined has in fact imprisoned them in a dirty stinking cage.

[25 : 55] I pray for the day when our nation will groan and weep under the oppression, the oppression of broken relationships and corporate greed and will cry to the Lord for mercy.

don't you? Don't you? Preparation, the Lord's discipline. Here's the third, the third work of preparation.

And it's Samuel's preaching. Samuel's preaching because under Samuel, the word of the Lord was no longer a rare thing.

now here in verse 3 we read that the people, that Samuel exhorted the people to return to the Lord with their whole hearts and to get rid of their foreign gods.

Now I just cannot imagine that Samuel just started preaching there and then when they first showed signs of repentance. This must have been his constant refrain for 20 years at least.

[27 : 01] and all Samuel is doing is just pointing them back, back to the first and second commandments. You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or earth beneath or in the waters below. That's all Samuel is doing. He's not telling them anything new. He's not telling them anything innovative.

And that is the work of the preacher. The preacher today like the prophet of old is simply to proclaim God's word.

What does the Bible say? What are the blessings for obedience? What are the consequences of disobedience? And the preacher like the prophet will warn his listeners, warn of the consequences of sin, of unforgiven sin, of unrepented sin.

He will tell them what their sin is and he will spell out to them what they must do about it. That they must repent. I don't know, forgive me please if I'm speaking out of turn, when I suggest that the call for repentance is rarely heard these days.

[28 : 14] Real heartfelt repentance. I'm not talking about turning over a new leaf. I'm not talking about just becoming a better person.

genuine repentance that doesn't minimize our sin or doesn't blame anybody else. And like David in Psalm 51, we say, for I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me.

Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.

Genuine repentance hangs its head in shame before the Father and confesses like the prodigal, Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Like the thief on the cross, those who are genuinely repentant, accept that they deserve nothing but God's wrath.

[29 : 24] Don't you fear God? Since you are under the same sentence, we are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve.

And here in 1 Samuel chapter 7 and in verse 6, the Israelites respond to Samuel's preaching by confessing their sin.

We have sinned against the Lord. And let me tell you, friends, that genuine repentance doesn't stop with tears and sorrow. It acts.

It does something about it. The Israelites got rid of their idols. When we are truly sorry for our sin, we will do everything in our power to remove ourselves from any temptation.

I think one of the most impressive examples of this is in Acts chapter 19, when the converts in Ephesus burned their scrolls of sorcery and magic.

[30 : 25] And you know that in Acts chapter 19, verse 19, it tells us that these scrolls were worth 50,000 drachmas. Do you know how much that is? A drachma was a day's wage.

That would be the equivalent of 138 years pay. And even in Stornoway, that's a lot of money. Genuine repentance hates sin.

It's a bit like this. If you don't like fish, if you don't like fish, it doesn't matter how beautifully cooked it is.

It doesn't matter how beautifully presented it is. It doesn't matter how tasty the sauce that comes with it is. You're not going to eat it because you don't like fish.

If you hate sin, it doesn't matter how attractive it appears. It doesn't matter how harmless it seems. If you hate sin, you're going to turn your nose up at it and you're going to say no.

[31 : 30] Ask the Lord for that. Ask the Lord to give you a loathing for sin. A genuine heart felt loathing for sin. A sin that will incur his wrath.

Anything that contradicts his ways of holiness. Anything that is contrary to his laws of love. Anything that is un-Christ like. Anything that would hamper your growth and grace.

Ask the Lord to give you a loathing for sin. Jesus said blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. He's talking about those who like these Israelites.

they wept. They moaned for their sin. And then they discovered the blessing. Then they discovered the blessing.

I want to put it this way. That this is exactly what the Lord was waiting for. Can I say that? Can I say that the Lord was desperate to bless his people. And at last here they are.

[32 : 30] At last. At last. now. Now the loving father. Now he can bless him. His fatherly discipline was working.

Look what happens. The Philistines draw near for battle. The Israelites are totally unprepared. They beseech Samuel to pray for them. Do not stop crying out to the Lord our God for us that ye may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines.

And what do we read in verse 10. Second half of verse 10. But the Lord thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion and they were routed before Israel.

The Israelites could not have had a clearer sign that the Lord had indeed heard their prayer and had pardoned them. And verse 12 tells us that Samuel took a stone and set it up as a monument to the Lord's grace.

He named it Ebenezer which means stone of help. Thus far hath the Lord helped us. Well there's a whole sermon in that phrase. But perhaps we should start every day with those words on our lips.

[33 : 51] Thus far has the Lord helped us. Preparation reformation for reformation. I long for revival.

I really do. I long for revival. I haven't come to you tonight with any magic formula. No sure fire way of guaranteeing revival through our land.

But I do hope that I have shown you from scripture what the Lord looks for. what the Lord looks for from his people by way of preparation for reformation.

He's looking for godly sorrow. He's looking for an acceptance of his rod of discipline. He is looking for genuine repentance of sin.

And friends might it be that when we start to take his word seriously perhaps the Lord will start taking our prayers seriously.

[34 : 58] Let's pray together. Our blessed God, our Father in heaven, we worship your holy name.

How can it be that a story set 3,000 years ago can speak to us this evening in the year 2013. Lord, it's because it's your word.

Lord, it's because we as human beings do not change. Lord, it's because you almighty God never change. These are eternal truths and we worship you.

Oh, heavenly Father, grant to us that same spirit, that spirit of mourning for sin, that spirit that accepts the rod of discipline, that spirit that looks to you and accepts what your word has to say to us.

Grant to us, oh Lord, genuine repentance of sin. We pray for our nation tonight. Oh, Lord God, this nation of Scotland, this nation of Great Britain, has known extraordinary blessing from you down through the centuries, second to none.

[36 : 27] And Lord God, we have sold our spiritual family silver. We have sold it for trash, for trinkets.

Lord God, have mercy upon us. And we pray, heavenly Father, the day will indeed come when the men and women of this nation would, like the prodigal son, realize, realize what they have lost, and would turn to you in humble repentance and in faith.

Lord, our simple prayer must be, may it come soon, may it not be too late for this nation, have mercy upon us and may your church be ready, may your church be ready, ready for revival, ready for reformation, ready for whatever you will do, ready, yes, even for persecution. May we be ready, ready for Jesus, ready for his coming, ready for his glory. Lord God, we worship your holy name.
Amen. Amen.