

## **A Return to the Gospel**

Sunday, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1987

### **2 Chronicles 34:21**

*“Go, enquire of the LORD for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do after all that is written in this book.”*

I've spent a great deal of time thinking about the message that I am going to bring to you today. I have given it much prayer and sought the leadership of the Spirit of God. I'm going to speak to you on the subject: “A RETURN TO THE GOSPEL.”

I wish that you would listen very carefully and consider the things that I am going to say and the Scripture that I will be reading. You listen now as I speak on the subject: “A Return to the Gospel.”

Our text will be taken from 2 Chronicles Chapter 34:21. The nation Israel had departed from the true worship of God which they did on many occasions. This time, the temple was deserted. The temple was in ruins. Evil kings had reigned and covetous priests and prophets had led the people into all forms of idolatry and had turned their hearts away from the living God.

A young man was made king by the name of Josiah. They crowned him king of Israel. He was a very young man. When Josiah came to be 26 years of age, he ordered the idols to be destroyed. He wanted to follow the God of his fathers.

He ordered the idols to be destroyed and he ordered the evil priests to be put to death. He sent word for the temple to be cleaned out and the worship of God to be restored.

While they were cleaning out the temple, Hilkiah the priest found a Book, a most important Book. This was the Word of God written by Moses. I suppose it was the first five books of the Bible, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Hilkiah the priest found the Book, the Word of God, and he dusted it off and brought the Word of God to the young king. That brings me to my text in 2 Chronicles 34:18. Hilkiah and Shaphan brought this Book, the Word of God to this young king Josiah.

He had never read the Word of God; he had never heard it read. It says in 2 Chronicles 34:19, *“It came to pass when the king heard the words of the Lord, when they read the Scriptures to him, he rent his clothes.”*

That was a sign of great grief and great sorrow on the part of people back then. He rent his clothes and said to the priest; *“Go and require of the Lord for me and for the people concerning the words of this Book. This Book that is found, you enquire of the Lord concerning me and the person about the words of this Book, for great is the wrath of our God because our fathers have not kept nor taught the words of this Book.”*

I could stop this message right here and leave it with you. Many of you could apply this illustration and this story. You could apply what happened here and apply it to our day. It can certainly be said, our fathers and our church leaders have not taught nor preached the words of this Book.

They have neglected the Word of the Lord. What God has written has been lost and ignored in all the ceremonies of religion, in all of the customs and rituals and traditions. In 1986 there is entertainment and foolishness that goes on in the name of religion. It is utter foolishness, theatrical productions and entertainment in the name of God with no preaching of the Scriptures.

You know this and I know this. I am one that is sent to cry against it, at least to some, who will hear my voice. Preachers on television and in their pulpits spend more time raising money and building buildings than they spend preaching the Word of God and the Gospel of Christ. Everybody listening to me knows that.

What did Paul say in Acts 17? He said, *“God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, He dwelleth not in temples and cathedrals made with hands, neither is He worshipped with men’s hands.”*

Yet, we keep on building and promoting and organizing as if He needed anything, *“Seeing He giveth to all life and breath and all things.”* Our Lord said, *“God is Spirit.”* He does not dwell in temples and churches and buildings. God is Spirit and they who worship God, *“Must worship Him in Spirit and truth.”*

*“The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and all they that dwell therein.”* He asked David, *“Would you build a house for me to dwell in, seeing the heaven of heavens cannot contain Me and the earth is My footstool?”*

Yet, knowing this, we go on building and raising millions and erecting great monuments for the flesh. We put our names on these monuments. We are organizing, promoting and entertaining in the name of God. We say that we are doing it for God and yet God

doesn't dwell in buildings, houses and things of that nature. Preaching the Gospel and preaching the Word of God has been literally pushed aside.

Not too many months ago I made a trip to preach in several places in England and the Ivory Coast, Africa. I was invited to the capital city of the Ivory Coast called Abidjan. It is a large city in the Ivory Coast section of Africa.

I was to preach Sunday morning at 8:30 in a large church called, The International Missionary Fellowship. This was a church made up of missionaries and their families from all over the world with different denominations. There were mostly Americans and English. I was to speak to them that Sunday morning.

I had traveled all the way from America to speak to several places but particularly on Sunday morning and Sunday evening in this International Missionary Fellowship Church. Service began at 8:30 and I asked the young man who was presiding, "How long does your service last?" He said, "We start at 8:30 and we are out by 9:15.

I asked him how long that he usually preaches and he said not over 15 minutes. I said, "What do you do?" He said, "We sing, we pray, we share, we have testimonies and this sort of thing. We don't preach over 15 minutes."

I said to the young man, "I'll be preaching a minimum of 30 minutes and when I open my message, I'll be talking to those missionaries about restoring the preaching of the Gospel from the pulpit."

In this day, preaching and teaching the Word of God has been pushed aside. It has to make way for entertainment, education, sharing, programs and social contact. Listen to me, we are justifying every gimmick and every trick we can come up with to get people to come to the House of God.

Preachers on television are justifying every gimmick that they can use from selling bricks to blooms. They sell lapel pins to necklaces. They offer tapes at exorbitant prices. They sell Bibles at exorbitant prices, Bibles with their pictures in them, their signatures on them and their notes on them. They are doing everything under the sun known to men to get people to support their organizations and we are ignoring the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Gospel is just not being preached. We talk about preaching it but not many people preach it. We are always saying, "We need to raise more money to get more stations, to

get more programs on, to send more missionaries to preach a Gospel that we never preach, that we never declare.”

Here is what we have today; we have the gospel of entertainment and the gospel of socialism, the gospel of this and the gospel of that. Paul warns us in 2 Corinthians 11; *“They will come preaching another Jesus. They will come preaching another spirit and another gospel.”* They will be preaching another Jesus and another spirit and another gospel.

Again, he warned us in Galatians. This was to the church in Galatia, not too many years after our Lord had risen and gone back to heaven. He said, *“I marvel that you are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel which is not another gospel; it is a perversion, a perversion of Jesus Christ.”*

Now, my message may be offensive but I am going to speak plainly to you. I am convinced that most of what is going on today in the name of God is another gospel. It is another spirit and it is another Jesus. It is not the Gospel of God’s grace and mercy at all. It is not glorifying to God and it is not exalting to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Here is one of our problems; it is a plea. We have made our God a beggar. Instead of men waiting on God, God waits on men. That is what is being preached. Instead of men pleading for mercy, we have God pleading with men to let Him show us mercy.

Today’s gospel is a pathetic plea from the pulpit and a plea for people to do something for God, rather than what must be done. God must do something for us.

It reminds me of the Pharisee in the temple who stood there and lauded himself and praised himself. He added up all the things he had done for God. He said, *“I tithe; I fast twice a week; I give alms to the poor; I’m not an extortioner; I’m not an adulterer; I’m not unjust and I’m not like other folks.”*

There, in the back of the building was a Publican, a notorious sinner, *“Who would not so much lift his eyes, (let alone his pleas and his hands to heaven), but he smote on his breast and cried; O God, you show mercy to me the sinner.”* That is the sinner pleading with God to show mercy.

The Pharisee was adding up all of his services and things that he had done for God. Here was a man asking God to have mercy. Our Lord said, *“The Publican went home justified.”*

Here was the rich, young ruler. He talked to Christ about his morality, talked to Christ of his righteousness; he talked to Christ of his faithfulness to the commandments all of his life and went home sorrowfully.

The harlot fell at His feet. She bathed His feet with the tears of repentance and received the forgiveness of her sins.

The religious people at the judgment in Matthew 7 were talking about all the things they had done in the name of the Lord. They bragged about how they had, *“Preached in the name of the Lord and cast out devils in the name of the Lord and done many wonderful works in the name of the Lord.”*

They talked about being on the mission field and at home and all these kind of places. Our Lord said, *“Depart from Me; I never knew you.”*

While the thief, the repentant thief who had nothing to boast of and brag about and to present to God except an empty-handed sinner walked into glory on the arm of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Men today make decisions for Jesus. The apostle Paul said, *“I obtained mercy.”* Men today are busy accepting Jesus. Paul said, *“We are accepted in the Beloved.”* That is the opposite. It is not our accepting Him it is Him accepting us.

He is not the guilty one, we are. He is not the offender, we are. We’ve made God the offender. We are out begging sinners to do something for God. We can’t add anything to God’s glory. He doesn’t need us; we need Him.

Men today are busy giving their hearts to God. The prophet said, *“He will take that old stony heart out and give you a heart of flesh.”* God doesn’t need my heart; I need a new heart.

Men today win souls and make converts while Paul said, *“I am what I am by the grace of God.”* I am not what I am by the cunning craftiness of some man. I am not what I am by the powerful persuasion of some preacher. I’m not what I am by the cleverness of some soul-winner. *“I am what I am by the grace of God.”*

*“We love Him because He first loved us.”* My friends, salvation is not of man. It is not of the will of man. The Scripture says, *“It is not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth, it is of God that showeth mercy.”*

Salvation is the work of His grace in us. It is not our work for Him that is the work of grace. It is His work for us and in us. Paul said, summing up his conversion, *“It pleased God to reveal His Son in Me.”* In 1 Corinthians 1:30, he says; *“Of Him are you in Christ. Of God are you in Christ Jesus who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.”*

Oh, I tell you; God doesn't need us to do anything for Him. We are desperately in need of God doing something for us. This pathetic plea from the pulpit today must make a Holy God nauseated.

When they picture Him in heaven wanting to do what He can't do, willing to do what He is not able to do and men resisting His hand on every turn, He said; *“My ears is not dull that I cannot hear. My arm's not short that I cannot save. Can I not do with My own what I will?”*

We need God to do something for us. We need new hearts and we need regeneration. We need to be born again. We need for God to show mercy to us. We need God to visit us with a refreshing from heaven.

We must not turn to men and find out what they are going to do; let's turn to heaven and see what God is going to do. He is not in our hands; we are in His hands.

I will tell you another problem that we have; I want you to listen carefully and think about this; today's Gospel has but one goal. Today's preachers have but one goal and today's church services have but one goal and that is to have you make heaven and miss hell.

That is all that is on the mind of the average preacher, the average person in the pulpit and the average church member. We want to make it to heaven and we don't want to go to hell, whatever it takes.

What does the Scripture talk about? The Scripture talks about knowing Christ, knowing God. The Scripture doesn't talk about being saved from hell; it talks about being saved from sin. We not only have a hell problem, we have a sin problem. We have to know the living God.

The message from today's pulpit is this and you have heard it so much, “Wouldn't you like to go to heaven when you die?” Man's goal in religion is to make it to heaven.

Paul's goal was to, "*Win Christ and be found in Him. That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection.*" In John 17:3, our Lord was praying to the Heavenly Father and He said this; "*Thou hast given Me authority over all flesh that I should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Me; and this is life eternal that they might know Thee.*"

I'm not talking about that they might have their names in heaven or their names missing but that "*They might know God, (the living God, the true God) and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.*" You can't give a man a title to heaven that doesn't have a union with Christ. Christ is salvation and Christ is heaven and Christ is life. People who are not joined in a living union with Christ have no inheritance in heaven. He is our inheritance. He is our reward.

I will tell you this, congregations today are just drenched with the terrors of hell and drenched with the comforts of heaven while they miss the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They miss substitution.

Here are the questions that are vital; it is not whether you go to heaven or hell but the questions that are vital are these.

How can a man be just with God? That is the question. How can he be clean that is born of a woman? How can sin be put away? If you put my sin away, you put away the cause of hell. How can a man attain to the righteousness of God? How can a man receive, have and possess the righteousness of God? If I have the righteousness of God I have heaven. If I have the righteousness of God which is Christ, I have heaven. "*How can God be Just and justify the ungodly?*" That is the question!

No, we've got this thing wrapped up in one thing, we say; "I want to go to heaven." That is all that we are interested in. You wouldn't like it. If you don't know Christ now and love Christ now, you wouldn't enjoy or love heaven because heaven is to be with Him.

Heaven is to praise and worship Him. Heaven is to adore and live in His presence. Heaven is to be like Christ. That is what heaven is! Heaven is nothing in the world but the perfection of what God starts on this earth in bringing a man in union with Jesus Christ His Son. I am leveling with you and I am telling you the truth.

This thing of the Gospel is not a heaven and hell proposition; it is Christ and a sin proposition. It is being redeemed from sin, saved from sin and it is being brought to love Christ, trust Christ, and know Christ and to believe Christ. It is being brought to a saving union with Jesus Christ.

Who is our substitute? Who is our sin-offering? Who is our Saviour? Who is our righteousness?

I will tell you another problem. Today's preaching and today's so-called Gospel is to the head and not to the heart. It is a message to the head. Religion today is debated, argued and fought over. Do you know why? It is because the heads of men are full of doctrines and creeds and their hearts are empty of Christ. Their heads are full of doctrine and their hearts are empty of the grace of God, the love of God and the mercy of God.

We talk about what we believe. Paul talked about, *"Whom he believed."* He says, *"I know whom I believed."* He also said, *"Christ is my life, Christ in you the hope of glory."* He said, *"I've travailed as a woman giving birth to a child until Christ be formed in you and your heart."*

We talk about God; Abraham believed God. We believe there is a God; Noah was busy obeying God. We talk about love; the disciples showed it in deed and in truth. We call Him *"Lord, with our lips, but our hearts are far from Him."*

Intellectual religion is confined to church buildings, denominations and organizations and heart faith is demonstrated in the home, on the job and on the street.

We have our religion in our heads. We are the smartest generation in theology that has ever lived. Our preachers have ThD, PhD, D.D. and M.D. but they don't have the knowledge of Christ Jesus in their heart. Therefore, they are butchering the souls of men and women.

Church people today are identified by the names of the men whose doctrines they embrace. We call them, Lutherans, Wesleyans, Calvinists and Armenians. We call them Mormons, we call them Baptists, we call them Presbyterians and we call them Catholic. We are known by the names of the men whose theology we embrace.

Believers are known by the name of the Lord whom they love; they were called Christians. They had been with Jesus. You know that is so and I do too.

Men today are convinced in their head, the people at Pentecost were broken in their hearts. God said, *"My son; give Me your heart."* He said, *"My son, keep your heart for out of it are the issues of life. God is nigh unto them of a broken heart. God saveth such as be of a broken heart and a contrite spirit."*

We think that if we can go by someone's house, knock on the door, spread our literature out and they can sit there, that we can match wits with them and argue doctrine with them. We think that we can debate with them and convince them of our ways and they will join our denomination.

They will even say, "We have won a convert." That is all that we have won, a convert to a man-made religion. Salvation is a heart work. Repentance is a heart work. Faith is a heart work. Love for Christ is a heart work.

We receive a new heart and a new nature by the power of the Spirit of God and are brought to love Jesus Christ. That is not something that people do sitting across a table arguing religion. They will say, "He's wrong and you are wrong; I'm right!" By nature, we are all wrong. *"Let God be true and every man a liar."*

Here is another problem; today's Gospel calls on people to stand up and be counted. We are so busy counting people. Someone said, "The glory of the church use to be the presence of the Lord." The glory of the church use to be the power of its Gospel in its pulpit. The glory of the church use to be the worship, the sincere part of worship of those who believe.

Today, the glory of the church is the size of its building. Today, the glory of the church is the height of its steeple. Right down town, the tallest steeple standing above all the other buildings is the glory of their church. They say, "We have the tallest steeple."

The glory of the church today is the choir leader, the cantatas, the orchestras and all the other instruments. The glory of the church today is the number of people there and the fact that their minister is a recognized "doctor of theology." Somebody said, "We ought to take a big, black paint brush and write on all of them, *"Ichabod, (the glory of God has departed)."*

We are calling on men to walk aisles and to stand up and be counted. We are calling on men to join up and sign pledge-cards, but the gospel of Jesus Christ demands that men bow down and worship God; fall down at His feet.

That is where Mary was always found; she was found at the feet of Christ, You know what He thought about her. That is where the harlot was found, at the feet of Christ. That is where the leper was found, at the feet of Christ and said, *"Lord, if you will; you can make me whole."* That is where Thomas was found when he made that great confession, *"My Lord and my God."*

What is going to be done? I don't know. Maybe "*Ichabod*" is already there. It may be that God will be pleased in our day to send a prophet and someone who will listen to him.

Much prayer goes up to God for our generation.