

DIVINE VISITATION – HOPE RENEWED

by, RICHARD OWEN ROBERTS

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Divine Visitation – Hope Renewed

Richard Owen Roberts

The following is edited from a message given at the Heart-Cry for Revival Conference in April 2006 at The Cove, Asheville, North Carolina U.S.A.

[Editors note: This message is the final one of a series of four messages on divine visitation. In the April 2007 Herald of His Coming Brother Roberts' message was focused on the great tragedy of not recognizing our season for a time of divine visitation. This final message has to do with a second chance, and a renewed hope for divine visitation.]

Let us read together several Scriptures, beginning with Luke 3:16: *"John answered and said to them all, 'As for me, I baptize you with water; but He who is mightier than I is coming, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He, Himself will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire.'"*

Here John the Baptist is drawing contrasts. He contrasts first his person with the person of Christ and secondly his baptism with the baptism of Christ. In the contrast of persons, although John the Baptist was the greatest of men born normally (Matt. 11:11), John makes it crystal clear, *"I am not worthy to untie the thong of His sandals."* As you see the contrast between the person of John and Christ, it helps to sense then the consequence of the contrast between the baptism in water and the baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire. Many of us have grown afraid of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We have seen and heard statements and claims made that cause us to shy away from the act. But, O brothers and sisters, as important as baptism in water is – and there is no more a degrading of baptism in water in this passage than there is a degrading of John the Baptist himself – but in comparison, baptism in water and baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire simply cannot really be compared. I hope and pray that all of you will truly understand, long for and pray continually for the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire not only in your own life, but in the Church. If you pursue the matter at all, it is crystal clear that the baptism of the Holy Spirit refers to power and to purity and to passion.

I have had the joyful privilege of knowing a great many of the men who have labored in the field of revival, for instance, Armin Gesswein, J. Edwin Orr, Stephen Olford and Leonard Ravenhill to name a few, all now with Christ in the glory. These were men who understood the contrast between water baptism and baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire and all men of passion and of purity. Oh, would to God that each of us without exception would know in increasing fullness the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire!

A second passage is Luke 24:49: *"And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."* Of course, Pentecost cannot be repeated, but each of us can have our own tarrying time – our fresh encounter and our baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire. My dear friend, J. Edwin Orr, frequently when I was with him would say to people, "Don't shy away from the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire. Don't worry about the extremist. After all, the safeguard in this matter is the Spirit. When it comes to speaking in tongues, there are two great things to keep in mind: neither command nor forbid (1 Cor. 14:39)." You can't go wrong if you take that approach. Our dear Savior called upon His followers to tarry in the city until *"clothed with power from on high."*

A third passage is Acts 1:4-8: *"Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, 'Which,' He said, 'you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.' So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, 'Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.'"*

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The Impact of a Remarkable Miracle

The fourth of these readings is the passage upon which we focus at this time, Acts 3: *"Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. And a certain man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms. But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, 'Look at us!' And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. And Peter said, 'I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene – walk!' And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God; and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him."*

There is a paragraph break at this point. Verses 1-10 occurred when they were entering the temple and now in verse 11 the service of prayer is over and they are coming out:

"While he was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement. But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, 'Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered up and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses. And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all. And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.

"Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed to everything He says to you. And it will be,' he didn't say this lightly, 'that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.'" And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days. It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'" For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways."

Offer of a Second Chance

There is a problem in this passage. In one sense it almost seems to contradict Matthew 23:32, where our Lord said concerning these people who were to crucify Him, *"Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers."* Pay attention also to that passage in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 that discusses and lays out with such crisp and clear truth that every entity is granted a measure of sin and when that measure is full that entity is under the wrath of God to the utmost. Looking on these matters at surface level, it almost seems as if Christ had pronounced the final doom upon

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these very persons whom Peter in his sermon is offering not merely a ray of hope, but an incredible opportunity to repent and to return and to enjoy seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord!

Let us turn to Jude, verses 22 and 23. Jude is helping us to understand that there are three categories of sinners that need to be rescued: the doubters, the contaminated and the contaminators. You cannot engage in the ministry of rescue with all personages in the same way. There are the doubters. They practice moral living and are diligent in living in a way that is acceptable both to society and to God. But they have no inner convictions concerning Jesus Christ, His death and burial and resurrection. They don't live in hope. Their moral purity is not an expression of their love to the Savior for His deliverance from sin in their lives. They simply want to live with high standards.

In the second category are those who are contaminated with vile sins. In the third category are the contaminators. These are the ones who have filled up the measure of the sins of their fathers and are already under wrath (Matt. 23:32).

We read at the end of Matthew 23: "*Your house is being left to you desolate!*" Christ wept over the city of Jerusalem because of the judgment that would come upon it (Luke 19:41-44). And yet here in Acts chapter 3 we have the Apostle Peter specifically describing the Christ crucifiers, and commanding now, in the name of Jesus, to repent and return and enjoy seasons of refreshing. It seems quite clear that those to whom Peter speaks in Acts 3 are those people who in many respects were good people but who had been drawn by their religious leaders who had set their hearts to destroy Christ, into this terrible action of saying to Pilate, "Don't release Christ. Give us a murderer instead. Crucify Him! Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

We all know at least a little about mob psychology and the ease with which people can be drawn into action that they would have been horrified to contemplate in advance and are ashamed of after it has happened. What a wonderful thing that even those who helped crucify Christ are offered a second chance, that there is indeed for them this wonderful, holy command to repent and return and enjoy seasons of refreshing!

The miracle with which Acts 3 begins is a very precious account. You can almost see it in your own mind. Here's the poor fellow unable to walk, carried to his position, probably laid out on some kind of a palette. He reaches up and Peter takes him by the hand. Peter commands him in the name of Jesus to rise and walk and suddenly the man leaps! He is standing and shouting and also captivating attention! We often try to capture the attention of the masses by ads and clever stunts and whatever other means we can discover, but oh, for the day when the power of Jesus Christ commands the attention of the masses! That's what a real revival is.

Albert Barnes, known for his series of Bible commentaries, also wrote a little book which is almost totally unknown, entitled *The Theory and the Desirability of Revival*. The thesis of his book was that metropolitan areas are moved by colossal events. This book was written about 1840, but the situation then is as now. We live in a suburb of Chicago and it is amazing to us how that whole city is gripped by sensational events. Often in Chicago it is some political scandal or some sporting event. Everywhere you go almost everyone is talking about it. The nature of large metropolitan areas is they are moved by colossal events.

The Theory and the Desirability of Revival makes it crystal clear that the ordinary outreach ministry of the Church scarcely touches the city. It is a colossal move of the Spirit of God in revival that arouses the entire city and sets everybody to talking about the Lord Jesus Christ. That's one of the blessed aspects of massive evangelistic crusades. People's attention is focused for a change upon the eternal and upon the Almighty.

There is nothing like a true revival to arouse the attention. In a season of revival it seems no one escapes the knowledge that God is moving and working and stirring. We all need to face this solemn fact: our cities will not be reached adequately by any normal means. But oh, when God visits

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His people, there we have hope for the masses! I don't see how we can fail to be stirred by that. If you can't think of any other reason to have a heart-cry for revival, that ought to do it.

The miracle in Acts is what drew the incredible crowd. Personally I don't think the day of miracles has passed. We ought not to focus upon the miracle, however, but upon the Miracle Worker, upon the Lord Himself. Isn't it marvelous that the very man that God chose to touch through the words of Peter and John was the most prominent beggar on the temple compound? Everybody knew him. When he began walking and leaping and praising God, the people must have said, "That's the beggar! He's never walked! We have known him for years, and now look! What has happened?" Often in revivals the first prominent converts are apt to be notorious sinners, persons whom the whole community is aware of, persons who are known to have wasted their lives on riotous living. When the beggar was healed, wonder and amazement gripped the people and a huge crowd immediately gathered. This gave Peter the opportunity to speak.

Peter's Sermon

These are the issues Peter deals with: number one, who did this? He makes it clear: certainly not me nor my brother John. "*Men of Israel,*" he said, "*why do you marvel at this? Why do you gaze at us as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk?*" (Acts 3:12). Peter points them to "*the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers.*" That's the One they needed to focus upon, that's the One whom they needed to understand was responsible.

Then Peter dealt with the question: why did God do it? And he makes it clear: He did it for the sake of His servant Jesus whom He has glorified. And He did it for *your* sakes so that you would know that the Father "*has glorified His servant Jesus, the One whom you delivered up.*"

Preachers, how many people understand these truths when you get through with your sermon on Sunday? Let me say here that over and over as I watch men preach I discover that the vast majority of our preachers know nothing about preaching.

Now Peter was a preacher. And what about you, preacher friend? Let's be honest with ourselves. One simple way of analyzing ourselves is to ask, what do people say when I get finished preaching? "O Pastor, that was interesting. I never thought of that." "Oh, what a lovely insight." Or do they come by the door, tears trickling down their cheeks, and say, "I have got to repent. I cannot keep pushing Christ away." Do they cry out, "Help me!" Or are they merely instructed? Preaching is more than teaching. Preaching is to move people from where they are to where they ought to be.

Now back to the sermon Peter preached after the miracle, to the question: why did God do it? God did it for the sake of the One "*whom you delivered up, and disowned in the presence of Pilate when he had decided to release Him. But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted unto you, but put to death the Prince of life, the One whom God raised from the dead*" (vv. 13-15). I don't believe those people missed Peter's message. I think they felt deeply their role in the crucifixion of Christ. They understood that Christ was raised up for them. Preacher friends, how many understand these truths when you get through with your sermon on Sunday?

Then Peter deals with the issue: how can you know that I am speaking the truth? Peter declares this to be "*a fact to which we [Peter and John] are witnesses.*" This miracle concerning which you are now wondering, he tells them, was based on "*faith in His name. It is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.*" What a sermon!

But then he confronts them with the issue of their own ignorance: "*You acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also.*" And then he adds a matter of incredible importance. He tells them that though they didn't realize it and thought they were eliminating a problem and getting rid of one who was making life extremely difficult to bear, all they did was to fulfill God's purpose. Had they known the Scriptures, they would have understood that from the beginning it was God's will

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that the Messiah should suffer. They thought they had resolved a matter, but when they got rid of one there were then 3,000 converts and in a few days, 5,000 and before very long, tens of thousands. You never win against God, and God had purposed in His heart to allow His only begotten Son to suffer. No one ever goes beyond what God has intended. And Peter is helping these people to understand they merely served as pawns in God's plan. We all have to deal with this as well.

Repent, Return, Obey

But now we come in verses 19 and 22 to the precious message of repentance. *"Repent therefore and return, that your sins might be wiped away in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord"* (v. 19). Read as well verse 22: *"Moses said, 'The Lord God shall raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed in everything He says to you.'"* Repent, return, obey. And the beautiful part of this is that the repentance is a gift from God, the return is God's enabling, and even the obedience was purchased for us by the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of you sense how often you have been defeated in your determination to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. May I tell you, brothers and sisters, the One who died and was buried, was the One who rose again!

Do you know these precious words from 1 Corinthians 1:30, *"But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."* The problem with many of us is we believe Christ is our justifier, and we are struggling to be our own sanctifier. It is a mighty discouraging task. I can't imagine anything more tiring than trying to be good. But dear friends, our justifier is our sanctifier. Many of you know the words in Ephesians 1:4: *"He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him."* We are elected to holiness. Who elected us? The One who has never lost a battle; the One who has never determined anything and failed; the One who always triumphs. Christ is our sanctification. How are we justified? By faith. How are we sanctified? By faith. How are we glorified? Glorification is death and to be glorified all you have to do is die. Christ sanctified and Christ justified and He has prepared the royal road to glory.

Isn't it beautiful that Peter is telling the very people that crucified Christ that if they will repent and believe, they will enjoy seasons of refreshing, these divine visitations from the presence of the Lord? They will discover that what they could not have done by themselves they are enabled to do in obeying the very Son of God who loved them and gave Himself for them. Every Christ-crucifier is commanded to repent and believe and enjoy and then walk in obedience.

Urgent Reasons for Repentance

There are urgent reasons for repentance stated here. In verse 19, the reason behind the command to repent is that your sins may be *"wiped away,"* or better yet *"blotted out."* Number two is *"in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord."* And number three is *"that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you"* (v. 20). There is also a warning in this passage, and I draw it to your attention in verse 23: *"It shall be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people."* Is this not Peter picking up on what Christ said? God, in His incredible mercy, is offering these Christ-crucifiers a second chance, but He will not forever offer these chances and they must face the fact that if they will not take heed, they shall be utterly destroyed.

In verses 25 and 26 there is a wonderful encouragement provided: *"It is to you who are the sons of the prophet, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'"* The fact is that many of these rich promises in Scripture have not yet been entirely fulfilled. When we repent and we turn and obey, the seasons of refreshing, and the divine visitation will work to the completion of these promises.

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I am satisfied that there is yet for the world another Great Awakening. There are too many promises that hang upon it to be overlooked. God is going to come again in mighty awakening power. How wonderful if it were to begin in your heart and if many of us, because we truly did repent and return and obey, might be part of the fulfillment of God's eternal plan and purpose in touching and affecting all the nations of the earth. Look at verse 26: *"For you first, God raised up His servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways."*

The Power of God

In the text we see nine important evidences of the power of God:

1. The power of God in raising Jesus from the dead.
2. The power of God in transforming Peter.
3. The power of God in enabling Peter and John to offer grace to those who crucified Christ.
4. The power of God in the miracle of healing.
5. The power of God in confrontational preaching.
6. The power of God in enabling sinners to repent and believe.
7. The power of God in enabling them to obey.
8. The power of God to destroy those who will not give heed.
9. The power of God in keeping His Word and fulfilling His promises.

I finish with this simple and yet delightful focus once more upon this lovely expression, *"seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord."* This is such a dry season in which we live. So many multitudes in the Church are thirsty. So few have found soul satisfaction. And oh, to think that something we do will truly result in that incredible blessing that they need!

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, that we are privileged, on behalf of the multitudes who won't, to repent and return and obey and to be those channels through whom a tidal wave of refreshing comes. May it be true for us all for the glory of our King Jesus. Amen.