

A TIME TO RETURN

INTRODUCTION

We just spent an amazing 15 days of rest at the South Coast. Sadly all good things come to an end and on Tuesday 20 October, we had to get into the car and drive home. When you've had such a good break, it's sometimes hard to embrace the thought of coming back and you find yourself wishing that you could remain in paradise a little longer, but reality is reality and there comes a day when it's "Time to return".

As I pondered this theme of a time to return, the Lord began putting the message that I will preach this morning on my heart. There are many instances in the Bible with the theme of returning and I want to draw in these themes this morning as the Lord challenges us with these words, "It's time to return".

MESSAGE

A TIME TO RETURN – FROM HIDING

Jacob had run away from his brother Esau who's birthright he had taken. He spent 20 years working for his uncle Laban in Padan Aram. But there came a time for him to return to his true home in Canaan. The place where he first encountered the Lord.

Genesis 31:13 (NKJV) I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family.' "

The Corona virus crisis has caused people to flee from their spiritual homes temporarily too. We haven't been in church for 7 months now but sooner or later we knew we would have to return. Gathering together is a key element of what makes us a church. There is a powerful corporate anointing when God's people gather together in unity in one place to glorify His name.

As I sought the Lord's direction about when the right time to re-open our church services, He confirmed it is the right time now using Genesis 31:13 and also Genesis 31:3

Genesis 31:3 (NKJV) Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you."

Today the Lord encourages us to return to our Christian roots, to return to our "Bethel", the "House of God" and to our Christian family. His promise to us is this, "Return and I will be with you".

We will take all the measures we can to keep God's people safe and we are going to stand on His word. From next Sunday morning, 1 November we will once again begin having our Sunday morning service at church.

In addition, we will continue with our Facebook online services so whether you attend in person or online, we will be gathered together in one accord as God's people, Christian Heritage Church.

A TIME TO RETURN – FROM BACKSLIDING AND SIN

One of the risks that we have faced during this extended period of not attending church services, Life Group, youth and other church activities, is the risk of backsliding. Many people struggle to walk consistently all the time without backsliding and coming together definitely assists in keeping one focused on God.

Jeremiah challenged the people about this:

Jeremiah 8:4-5 (NKJV) "Moreover you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord: "Will they fall and not rise? Will one turn away and not return? 5 Why has this people slidden back, Jerusalem, in a perpetual backsliding? They hold fast to deceit, They refuse to return."

The Bible teaches that people do fall, but, it's also normal for them to rise from that fall, and return after turning away. For some reason Israel just kept falling and didn't return. Could it be that they felt they had fallen too far? Could it be that they didn't have the will to return? Could it be that they just gave up?

Jeremiah 8:6 (NKJV) I listened and heard, But they do not speak aright. No man repented of his wickedness, Saying, 'What have I done?' Everyone turned to his own course, As the horse rushes into the battle.

What about us? God is listening and waiting for us to come to our senses, saying, "What have I done? Please forgive me Lord". That's all it takes. It's time to return!

How do we return from backsliding?

Luke 15:11-32 (NKJV) Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. 12 And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood. 13 And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. 14 But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. 15 Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.

17 "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, 19 and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."' 20 "And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. 23 And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; 24 for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry.

- ***We return when we remember our Heavenly Father!***
- ***We return when we come with penitent hearts.***
- ***His love is greater than our sin or our backsliding.***
- ***He is waiting for us with open arms.***

When we have backslidden, we must remember the parable of the prodigal son, our Heavenly Father is waiting with open arms for us to return. He loves us and wants to restore us. Are you willing to return today?

A TIME TO RETURN – BY RELYING ON GOD’S FAITHFUL CHARACTER

Understanding God’s amazing character makes it easier for us to return:

Psalm 37:23-24 (NKJV) The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, And He delights in his way. 24 Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the Lord upholds him with His hand.

When I’m with my granddaughter Skylar, my hand is always there to help her over obstacles. Sometimes if I’m not close, she falls and cries. In no time I’m there to whip her up into my arms and comfort her.

It’s the same with God. He loves us and delights in us. He watches over us with a hand ready to catch us when we fall. We have amazing hope, and even when we fall, His hand is reaching out to lift us up out of our backsliding and sin.

1 John 1:9 (NKJV) If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We return to the Lord by confessing our sins and then trusting in His faithfulness and His just nature to forgive us. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from ALL unrighteousness. Let us return to the Lord today!

A TIME TO RETURN - COMPLETE SURRENDER

Genesis 35:1 (NKJV) Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother."

Once again, Jacob had to move. God told him to return to Bethel where he had first encountered God. But returning to God meant that Jacob's family had to rid themselves of the idols that they had begun to worship. He told them to bring them all to him.

Genesis 35:4 (NKJV) So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods (idols) which were in their hands, and the earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which was by Shechem.

Why did Jacob hide the idols in a place where they could be recovered instead of destroying them? This was not complete surrender and Israel battled with idolatry throughout the Old Testament.

A word of warning to every parent. Where did those idols come from? Why had Jacob's children even begun worshipping idols? Could Rachel have caused it?

Genesis 31:19 Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel had stolen the household idols that were her father's.

Could those idols have been the same ones that Jacob buried under the Terebinth tree?

Parents, our influence on our children is massive. It can't be a case of "do as I say and not what I do". For our children it's more likely to be, "monkey see, monkey do". No, I'm not saying we are monkeys, I'm just using the saying as an illustration.

Jacob, as the leader of the family did the right thing in removing those idols from his children and household. Our children's spiritual wellbeing has very much to do with our own walk with God!

What about us today? When we come to God, is it in an attitude of complete surrender or are there hidden idols keeping us from complete victory in Christ? Let us forsake all else and return to our God in complete surrender today. He loves us and wants to give us total victory over the enemy and his snares.

A TIME TO RETURN TO OUR FIRST LOVE

Finally, I want to speak about another return, the return to our first love. When we lose our initial love for Jesus, it becomes much easier to fall into temptation, backsliding and sin. Not being in church could also have impacted us in this manner. Here is Jesus challenge to us from the Book of Revelation:

Revelation 2 (NKJV) "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 2 "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. 4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. 6 But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."

- ***Have we lost our first love?***
- ***Do we still have the zeal we once had?***
- ***Does God's word still challenge us and excite us?***
- ***Do we still sense and know the amazing presence of the Holy Spirit like we once did?***

Today Jesus is calling us back, "remember your first love, return to me, my child." It's time to return.

CONCLUSION

I conclude with this: **Genesis 31:13** (NKJV) I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family.' "

Today, God is calling on us to return:

- Return from hiding and come back to church – He will be with us.
- Return from backsliding and sin – He is faithful, and He will restore us.
- Return by relying on His faithful character – reach out and take hold of His hand.
- Return in complete surrender – don't have hidden idols.
- Return to our first love – Do we love Jesus the way we once did? Let us remember where we have fallen from and tun back to Him.

It's time to return! What do you need to return from today?