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Preacher: Rev Innes Macrae

[0 : 00] The Acts of the Apostles, chapter 17. We shall begin reading at verse number 10.

And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea, who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily whether those things were so.

Therefore many of them believed, also honourable women which were Greeks, and of men not a few. But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also and stirred up the people.

Then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go, as it were, to the sea. But Silas and Timotheus abode there still, and they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens, and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus, for to come to him with all speed, they departed.

[1 : 22] Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.

Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? Other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods, because he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection.

And they took him and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine whereof thou speakest is. For as thou bringest certain strange things to our ears, we would know therefore what these things mean.

For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, to the unknown God, whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

My text this evening in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 17, and let us read at verse 32. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.

[2 : 53] So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave unto him and believed, among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

In the seventeenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, we have Paul's great sermon before the Areopagus. The Areopagus was an Athenian court.

It used to meet in times previous to this upon Mars Hill, and so we read that Paul stood on Mars Hill. It still went by that name, and he preached to those members of that court.

In preaching to those heathen people, Paul laid great emphasis upon the doctrine of God. That was his subject.

God, the great creator of all things. God, the sovereign Lord of the universe. God, the one who at the end of the age will be the judge of all.

- [4 : 08] And what was the reaction of those people to Paul's great sermon? We know that there was a threefold reaction.
- We are told that in these verses. There were those who mocked. They scorned Paul's message. As soon as he spoke of the resurrection from the dead, they poured scorn and derision upon the message that he declared.
- Surely you don't expect us to believe that, Paul. We can believe our Epicurean philosophy. We can believe in the plethora of gods and goddesses of the Greeks.
- But that one came and died and rose again the third day, we just cannot believe that. And there are still those who, though they are given over to superstition, refuse to believe what the Bible teaches.
- They think they are too enlightened to believe the teachings of this book. Too enlightened to believe that one, the Son of God, became incarnate.
- [5 : 26] That by his death upon a cross he atoned for sin. That he rose again the third day and that he ascended to God's right hand.
- They pour scorn on such teaching. They mock him. They oppose it. They reject it out of hand. But then there were those whose reaction to Paul's sermon was entirely different.
- We're told here that there were certain men who clave unto him. They adhered to Paul. They believed his message.
- They accepted it. They committed themselves to it. They believed in the Christ of whom he was declaring, the one by whom God would at the last day judge the world.
- They trusted in him. They committed themselves to him. They came to know God through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- [6 : 28] They became Christians. They committed themselves to the Lord. Amongst them was a man called Dionysius. He was a member of the court of the Areopagus.
- A learned man he would have been. And we're told that Paul's preaching affected him. There was also a woman called Damaris.
- We know nothing about her, about what we're told here. But she believed. She was affected by what Paul preached. God blessed to her the message that Paul preached.
- Her heart went out to Christ. And she became his follower. And there were others too, we are told here. Others with them.
- Paul had not planned to visit Athens. He had not intended going there. But while he was there, he proclaimed this message.
- [7 : 35] And God blessed it. And there were certain Athenians who believed and who were saved. We do not read that Paul established a church in Athens.
- But when he left Athens, he left behind him certain people who had become followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. But then there was a third group of people.
- There's a third reaction of which we read here. We have it in verse 32. Others said, we will hear thee again of this matter.
- They did not mock Paul's message. They did not jeer at it and pour scorn and derision upon it. They had a certain measure of respect.
- They were too polite to do that kind of thing. They were superior people. But they politely refused to receive it and to believe it and to commit themselves to it.
- [8 : 36] They said, we will hear thee again at some other time of this matter. Perhaps, like Felix, they were deeply affected by it and trembled when they heard it.
- But they said, like Felix, at a more convenient season we will hear thee again. And there are still people whose reaction to the gospel message is just that.

They don't ridicule it. They don't openly repudiate it. They don't pour scorn upon it. They show a measure of respect toward the truth of God.

You may even find them regularly, week by week, in the place where that message is proclaimed. Perhaps it is that they like to hear that message being proclaimed.

But they will not commit themselves to it. They will not believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ and become his followers. I want this evening to look with you at this attitude.

[9 : 45] And I want to ask, why is it that it is so wrong? Why must we get beyond it? And I want to suggest five reasons.

And first of all this, because the gospel is God's truth. The gospel is God's truth. It is true what Paul preached there, that God is the great creator.

It is true that he is the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth. It is true that he will judge all men at the last day. It is true that Jesus Christ is his eternal son who became man.

It is true that that Christ by his death upon the cross of Calvary has made atonement for sin, has provided reconciliation for sinners.

It is true that he is the one by whom God will one day judge all men. It is true that he rose again from the dead on the third day.

[10 : 51] It is true that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, that only by his blood can sin be cleansed away, that a sinner can be reconciled to God only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

All that is God's truth. It is not given to us, my friends, for our consideration as a kind of intellectual exercise merely.

It is not given to us for discussion and debate and argument that we may argue about it and find in such discussion some kind of intellectual stimulus.

It comes to us with the authority of heaven. It comes to us from the God who cannot lie. It is his truth and therefore it demands a verdict.

My friend, if you refuse to commit yourself to the truth of the gospel, if you refuse to believe upon Christ, if you refuse to do as this great God says in his gospel, then you are lost.

[12 : 05] You are perishing. You remain unforgiven. You are under condemnation on that broad road that leads to destruction. He who has the Son has life.

He who has not the Son has not life. There can be no neutrality as far as God's gospel is concerned.

Truth demands a verdict. if you are not on the Lord's side, then you are against him. If you are not on his side, then you are against him.

Jesus said, he that is not for me is against me. You cannot sit on the fence. If you do, you are aligning yourself with those who are against God and who are against his Christ.

He demands that you be decided in your commitment to him, that you hold nothing back, but be wholeheartedly committed to him.

[13 : 13] How could it be otherwise? This Christ is the one who was eternally with the Father and who left that environment of glory and came down to this world.

He who was rich for our sakes became poor. He knew here in this world great poverty, rejection, suffering, and death.

He came and he died upon the cross of Calvary. It was a terrible death that he died there. A cruel death. They took him and by wicked hands they crucified him and they slew him.

When he died there, he died bearing the very curse of God upon the sin of man. He, by his death upon that cross, has purchased reconciliation with God for sinners.

He came to make atonement for sin and by his death there at Calvary, he has made atonement for sin. He has provided salvation for sinners.

[14 : 25] He has made reconciliation with God available. And God the Father has accepted his work. He has demonstrated that so plainly by raising him again from the dead on the third day and by exalting him to the highest heights.

God has done that and don't you think that that being so, he will look for wholehearted commitment to his gospel, to his son, to the savior whom he has provided.

Do you think he will tolerate that he will look lightly upon a refusal to commit oneself to him to receive that salvation that he has made available, that he will look with toleration upon rejection, a refusal to receive the reconciliation provided by his son.

It is surely the most monstrous insult to reject or not to receive that salvation, that reconciliation purchased at so great a cost.

It's a wrong attitude, this. We will consider it at some other time because the gospel is God's truth. And secondly, it is a wrong attitude because of the uncertainty of life.

[16 : 04] Because of the uncertainty of life, we are being reminded daily of the uncertainty of life. There are those who reach old age before the final summons comes, but there are others to whom it comes in middle life or even in youth.

To some it comes after an illness, short or long, but to others the call comes without any warning whatsoever. We have no promise of a moment.

To that rich farmer the Lord said, this night thy soul shall be required of thee. Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.

Oh, how dangerous it is to procrastinate. The Bible knows nothing of a second chance after death.

As the tree falls, so shall it lie. It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment.

[17 : 13] live and die in a Christless condition, and that will be your state throughout eternity. Here is a man who has heard the gospel message.

He has heard it many times. He knows something of his need as a sinner. He has become conscious in some measure of his need as a sinner.

He has heard of Christ. He knows about Christ. He knows that he is the one who saves to the uttermost. He knows that salvation is found only in Christ.

He knows that Christ shed his blood for the salvation of sinners. He has had explained to him that Christ died as the sinner's substitute.

He knows that salvation is not by any works of his own, but can be obtained only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[18 : 17] But he puts the matter off. He puts the matter off until a more convenient season. And then suddenly, unexpectedly, without a moment's warning, he is called from time into eternity.

And he finds himself like the rich man in our Lord's parable, in torment. moment. Oh, how tragic it is.

Here is a man who knew the way of salvation, but he put off responding to the gospel he heard. He put off coming to Christ.

It's sad when a person who has never heard the gospel, passes from time into eternity. eternity. But it's so much more tragic to hear of somebody passing into the great eternity who has heard of the refuge, who has heard of the place of safety, who has heard of the great salvation that God has provided.

He passed into eternity knowing there was a place of refuge, but he had not fled to it. He passed into eternity knowing that God had provided a full and everlasting salvation, but he failed to avail himself of it.

[19 : 40] He was going to attend to the matter someday, there's always tomorrow, but that day never came. Unexpectedly, he was called hence.

Oh, my friend, I plead with you, make no delay. I beseech you, I urge you, I implore you, give heed to the message of the gospel, respond to it, turn in simple trust to the Lord Jesus Christ, and if you come to him now, and simply trust him as your own savior, then if the last messenger should come this very night, you will go to be with Christ, which is far better.

this attitude we're looking at, it's wrong because of the uncertainty of life, because the gospel is God's truth, because of the uncertainty of life, and it's wrong thirdly because of the certainty of judgment, the certainty of judgment.

Paul spoke about that to those learned Athenians. He did so in verse 31, God has already appointed the day of judgment.

The date of that day has already been determined. We don't know when it will be, but the dawning of that day is absolutely certain.

[21 : 32] Perhaps you have a birthday coming up soon. You don't doubt that that day will come, do you? Perhaps you have an appointment at the end of February, or in March with your doctor, or with your dentist, or with your lawyer.

You expect those days to come. You expect to keep those appointments. But there's really no certainty about them. Before ever that day comes, you might be called away.

You might not have to keep those appointments, but here is an appointment that you must keep. There's no avoiding it. Here is a day that will most certainly come.

It is marked out on God's calendar. And on that day, the day of judgment, Christ himself will return in person.

Heaven has received him for a season. He went up in the cloud from the Mount of Olives. The cloud came and received him out of their sight, out of the sight of the eleven disciples.

[22 : 38] But there's a day coming when the trumpet blast of God will sound, when there will be that great shout, the voice of the archangel will be heard, and the Lord himself shall appear in person.

He shall appear in person for the last judgment. The judgment day will have arrived. Nothing is more certain than that that day will arrive.

And when it comes, the Lord Jesus Christ to whom the judgment is committed, will sit upon his great white throne, all who have ever lived will be summoned before him.

The graves shall give up their dead. All shall appear before him. All who are alive at his coming shall appear before him too. What a scene that will be.

You can read a little bit about it in the 25th chapter of Matthew's Gospel. There will be those on his right hand. To them he will utter marvelous words.

[23 : 47] come ye blessed of my father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. They will go into bliss that we cannot now imagine.

But there will be those on his left hand also. To them he will utter most dreadful words. I can scarcely utter them without trembling.

Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

In view of all that my friend ought you not to hasten to make your peace with God. Flee to Christ.

Make your way to the shelter that is provided. Believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Trust in him. Rest upon him. Don't say I leave it till another day comes.

[24 : 58] Judgment is certain. so is the salvation of all who are in Christ. The certainty of judgment.

This attitude we're looking at tonight it's so wrong because the gospel is God's truth. Because of the uncertainty of life. Because of the certainty of judgment.

And it is wrong fourthly because of the effect of unbelief. the effect of unbelief. If you have heard the gospel message and understood something of it how do you respond?

There if you have heard it and understood something of it and your response your reaction is I won't consider it now. I'll consider it at some later date.

I won't give my attention to that matter at present. What is likely to happen? Let me tell you what may well happen. It may well be that you will become hardened against the gospel.

[26 : 17] That is the effect of unbelief. you may reach the stage when you will say I've heard all that before. I don't openly repudiate it.

I don't despise it. But I don't want to consider it now. And you will find that you have become quite unconcerned about your soul's salvation.

you will be able to sit under gospel sermon after gospel sermon and remain quite unmoved. You who perhaps in the past were deeply moved under the preaching of the gospel having put it away have become so hardened against it that you no longer show concern or anxiety under the preaching of that great message.

And if I may say it tenderly but sadly I believe that in our free church congregations there are a considerable number of people who have become hardened under the preaching of the gospel.

If I were to stand here tonight or if any preacher were to stand in his pulpit and preach false doctrine they would detect it they would be very critical of it and rightly so but their hearts are unmoved under the preaching of the message of redeeming grace they fail to be warned to the preaching of a saviour's love.

[27 : 58] Could I be speaking to somebody here tonight and as you look back you have to confess that there was a time when under the preaching of the gospel you were concerned about your soul salvation you were deeply moved under the preaching of this message but you put such thoughts of concern away from your mind I mustn't become upset you said I mustn't become too serious about this religion is all right in its place but I mustn't carry things too far I must be moderate I must know where to draw the line and so without openly repudiating the message of the gospel you have refused seriously to consider it you are going to put it off to a later date I'll consider it at some later date but that later date has come and you are hardened under the gospel message you're not at all deeply moved and concerned tonight about your soul salvation oh my friend if that is so you're in a most perilous condition you shall be crying out to

God day and night that he would have mercy upon you and that he would work in you by his spirit hardened against the gospel the effect of unbelief and remember this you can't come to Christ whenever you choose you can't say I'll come next week I'll come next month I'll come next year it's not in your power to choose to decide when you are going to respond to the message of the gospel you can only come to Christ when the spirit of God draws you Jesus said no man can come unto me except the father who sent me draw him you can come and you can be you will be willing to come to Christ only in a day of God's power as he makes you willing and you have no guarantee he that the spirit will draw you tomorrow he is sovereign in this matter as he is in every other oh my friend if you are aware of some concern of soul tonight if you are aware of some desire for Christ and his salvation.

Nurture that desire. Fear to lose it. Yield to it. Don't resist the strivings of God's Spirit.

Seek to be drawn to Christ by the Spirit of God. If you're aware of the Spirit's strivings now, this is a favorable time to come to Christ.

Seek ye the Lord while he may be found. Call ye upon him while he is near. The effect of unbelief.

[31 : 15] The Gospel is God's truth. The uncertainty of life. The certainty of judgment. The effect of unbelief.

And there's a fifth reason why this attitude of procrastination is so wrong. And it is this. Because of God's command. Because of God's command.

God is sovereign. He is the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth. And the sovereign has issued his command.

And what is it? You have it in verse 30. In the second half of verse 30. It is this. Repent. Now God commands all men.

Everywhere. To repent. Putting off repenting. Procrastinating. Saying you'll deal with a matter on some other occasion.

[32 : 16] At some future date. Is an act of defiance. An act of defiance. Of the sovereign Lord himself. The sovereign says repent.

You say not yet. Do you think you have any right to say that? To talk like that? God commands you now to repent.

You really have no option. He who made you. He who sits upon the throne of the universe. Issues his command.

Repent. I have tried to explain many times. What repentance is. It is a change of mind. Regarding sin.

Previously the person who has now repented. Did not think of sin. As something terribly serious. But now he sees it. As that which God hates.

[33 : 14] And that which calls forth. The wrath of God. It is a. Change of mind. But the emotions are affected as well.

The sin that he previously loved. This person now hates. He turns from it. With grief. And with hatred of it. He mourns over it.

It grieves him. It upsets him. It causes him to mourn. Blessed are they that mourn. As I was saying in the morning. For they shall be comforted. He sheds his tears. His tears of contrition.

And above all. It's a change of direction. This person. The person who repents.

Makes an about turn. He begins to move in the opposite direction. He now. Repents and forsakes his sin. With grief and hatred of it.

[34 : 14] And with full purpose of. And endeavor after new obedience. There's God's command.

There's the sovereign's command. Repent. Have you repented? And it is his command. To believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

Trust in Christ. Believe upon him. That's the sovereign's command. Look unto me. And be ye saved. All the ends of the earth.

Come unto me. All ye that labor. And are heavy laden. And I will give you rest. We often talk of the gospel invitation.

And the gospel is an invitation. It is a most gracious invitation. It is the most gracious invitation. That was ever issued. But it is more than an invitation. It is a command.

[35 : 13] From the sovereign Lord. God has given his beloved son. To be the sinner's savior.

He has set him forth. As the all sufficient savior of sinners. He has given him. To make atonement for sin. He has made atonement for sin.

And now God says. Believe on my son. Cease relying upon yourself. Or upon anything. That you have ever done.

Or upon anybody else. Cleave to Christ. Cling to Christ. Believe upon Christ. Hold to him. Lay hold by faith upon him.

Lean your whole weight upon him. That's God's command. His command then is in two parts. Repent. Repent of sin.

[36 : 10] Believe. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Those two always go together. Where you have true repentance. You will have saving faith.

Where you have saving faith. You will always have repentance unto life. The Holy Spirit himself will enable us to call upon everything within us.

To magnify thy great name. To praise thee the Lord our God. We bless thee for all that thou art. For thou art God. The one living and true God.

The sovereign Lord of the universe. The creator of the heavens and of the earth. And of all that is in them. Thou art the provider and the preserver.

Thou art the redeemer of thy people. And we come and we bow in worship before thee now. Praising thee and worshipping thee and thanking thee for all thy greatness and thy goodness.

[37 : 10] We bless thee O Lord our God. That thou art providing for our daily needs. We thank thee for health of body. We thank thee for soundness of mind. We thank thee for all the good things of this life.

Thou dost supply them so lavishly. And we pray that we might not take God's good gifts for granted. But that we will return thanks day by day.

We praise thee O God for Jesus Christ our redeemer. We thank thee for the glory of his person. For he belongs to the Godhead. He is thine own eternal son.

We thank thee afresh for the marvel of his incarnation. That the word became flesh and dwelt among us. And that men beheld his glory.

The glory as of the only begotten of the father. Full of grace and truth. O God we bless thee for the Lord Jesus the God man.

[38 : 11] The one who remains God and man forevermore. We thank thee for his life here in this world. He was made under the law and he kept that law perfectly.

He did so on our behalf and we thank thee this is so. We thank thee O Lord our God for his inspired teaching. The teaching that comes to us now in the four gospels.

We thank thee O Lord our God for his mighty works. For his miracles of healing. That indicate he is indeed the Messiah foretold of old.

We thank thee that he unstopped the ears of the deaf. That he opened the eyes of the blind. That he cleansed the lepers and made the lame to walk.

And that he raised the very dead. O Lord our God we thank thee. That he died for sinners upon the cross of Calvary. That he shed his blood for our redemption.

[39 : 12] That he came in love to give himself for us. We thank thee that God so loved the world. That he gave his only begotten son. That whosoever believes in him should not perish.

But have everlasting life. And we praise thee and bless thee afresh. That Jesus rose in triumph from the dead. That ours is the living redeemer.

May he be amongst us here today. And may we sense his holy presence. We thank thee for the Holy Spirit whom he has sent down.

And we pray that he will guide us and direct us and control us in our worship. That we will bring acceptable spiritual worship to thee. That we will understand this spirit inspired word.

And that we will have it powerfully applied. By that same spirit to our minds and to our hearts. And so we pray that thou would take from us anything that would hinder us in our worship of thee here today.

[40 : 18] O God forgive us we pray. And bless us now. For the redeemer's sake. Amen. We read God's word now in the book of Hosea.

The book of Hosea. Chapter 7. We read from the beginning of the chapter.

Hosea chapter 7. When I would have healed Israel. Then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered.

And the wickedness of Samaria. For they commit falsehood. And the thief cometh in. And the troop of robbers spoileth without. And they consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness.

Now their own doings have beset them about. They are before my face. They make the king glad with their wickedness. And the princes with their lies.

[41 : 20] They are all adulterers. As an oven heated by the baker. Who ceaseth from raising after he hath netted the dough until it be leavened. In the day of our king.

The princes have made him sick with bottles of wine. He stretched out his hand with scorners. For they have made ready their hearts like a oven.

Whiles they lie in wait. Their baker sleepeth all the night. In the morning it burneth as a flaming fire. They are all hot as an oven.

And have devoured their judges. All their kings are fallen. There is none among them that calleth unto me. Ephraim. He hath mixed himself among the people.

Ephraim is a cake not turned. Strangers have devoured his strength. And he knoweth it not. Yea, grey hairs are here and there upon him.

[42 : 17] Yet he knoweth it not. And the pride of Israel testifieth to his face. And they do not return to the Lord their God. Nor seek him for all this.

Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart. They call to Egypt. They go to Assyria. When they shall go I will spread my net upon them. I will bring them down as the fowls of the heaven.

I will chastise them as their congregation has heard. Woe unto them. For they have fled from me. Destruction unto them. Because they have transgressed against me.

Though I have redeemed them. Yet they have spoken lies against me. And they have not cried unto me with their heart. When they howled upon their beds.

They assemble themselves for corn and wine. And they rebel against me. Though I have bound and strengthened their arms. Yet do they imagine mischief against me.

[43 : 19] They return but not to the most high. They are like a deceitful bow. Their princes shall fall by the sword of their rage of their tongue. For the rage of their tongue.

This shall be their derision in the land of Egypt. Amen. May God add his blessing to that reading from his word. And to his name be the praise and the glory.

You will find my text this morning in the book of Hosea chapter 7. And at verse 9.

Hosea chapter 7 verse 9. Strangers have devoured his strength and he knoweth it not. Particularly these words. Yea, grey hairs are here and there upon him.

Yet he knoweth not. Grey hairs are here and there upon him. Yet he knoweth not. The reign of King David was the golden age of Israel's history.

[44 : 32] It was during David's reign that the borders of the kingdom extended further than any time before or since. Yet after the reign of his illustrious son and successor King Solomon.

That great kingdom divided into two. There was the northern kingdom. There was the northern kingdom Israel. Or Ephraim as it is called in this chapter.

Israel with its capital at Samaria. And then Judah in the south. The southern kingdom with its capital at Jerusalem. Israel.

From its very inception. The northern kingdom introduced into its worship elements that had no sanction, no authority in the word of God and the law of the Lord.

The first king, King Jeroboam I, had made those golden calves. They were set up a dan and a vessel.

[45 : 37] These objects expressly forbidden in the second commandment were brought in to the worship of Jehovah. Israel was on a slippery slope.

And in due time, the worship of the heathen god Baal, the worship that was common amongst the Canaanites themselves, was common amongst the Israelites too.

It was given great encouragement by King Ahab. And by his wicked and scrupulous heathen wife, Queen Jezebel. Israel could not but face the judgment of God.

God's means of judgment upon Israel was that mighty nation to the northeast of Israel. The nation called Assyria.

And in due time, in the year 722 BC to be exact, Samaria, the capital of Israel, fell to the Assyrians.

[46 : 44] And the nation of Israel was no more. The people were carried away as captives into Assyria. And the land was re-peopled by an alien population.

The nation, the capital and the nation itself had fallen. Israel has passed out of history. The northern kingdom came to an end.

God's gracious purposes henceforth were to be bound up with the southern kingdom of Judah. Chosea prophesied in that northern kingdom in the quarter of a century or so before the fall of the kingdom to the Assyrians.

It was a time of terrible political upheaval. Kings were being assassinated and their assassins were usurping the throne. The Assyrians by this time had invaded northern Israel and they were threatening Samaria, the capital city, threatening the kingdom itself.

As Chosea looked at the people, as he looked at the nation, he saw there unmistakable signs of moral and of spiritual decay.

[48 : 09] He saw signs of degeneration. A sprinkling of gray hairs upon a person's head is natural and normal in the physical realm.

It indicates the onset of the aging process. But that, I say, is natural. It's normal in the physical realm. It comes to all of us. But Chosea saw something occurring.

He saw that occurring where it ought not to be occurring. He saw it occurring in the people of God. In the moral and in the spiritual realm.

He saw the gray hairs there, the signs of moral and spiritual decay upon the people of Israel. And they knew it not.

We read here, gray hairs are here and there upon Ephraim. Yet he knoweth it not. And this is still one of the great dangers for the people of God.

[49 : 23] That the gray hairs should appear upon them. These are the signs of the onset of middle age and of old age, of the aging process.

I repeat that in the natural realm, in the physical realm, it is normal and it is natural. But in the spiritual realm, in the moral and spiritual realm, amongst the people of God, it is altogether abnormal.

It ought not to be taking place. While it is true of the people of God, of each one of them, that the outward man is perishing and decaying, it should also be true, it is also true, that the inward man is being renewed day by day.

That is what ought to be taking place, their youth being renewed like the eagles. Oh, may God show us today, if this sad and terrible and distressing condition is true of any of us, that morally and spiritually, there are appearing the gray hairs upon us.

And showing us those gray hairs, may he alarm us about such a dreadful condition. I want then, first of all, to notice with you the evidence, the evidence of this sad condition.

[50 : 50] In what ways do we see it? This spiritual lethargy, this lack of spiritual vigor, this sign of aging and of spiritual and moral decline.

Where do we see, what are the gray hairs that we see appearing upon the people of God? Think, first of all, of our reaction to the preached word.

Our reaction to the preached word. Cast your mind back to the days when first you came to know the Lord. How you loved them to sit under the preaching of the word of the Lord.

You are hanging up on every word. You are drinking it in. You would be saying to yourself, how does this apply to me? How can I assimilate this into my life?

What must I do about this? You were concerned to apply it. You wanted it to affect your daily life and your whole relationship with the Lord.

[51 : 52] You would go home and you would think over what you heard. You would pray over it and you would act upon it. You were concerned to apply it to daily living. My Christian friend, is that still the case with you?

Do you still take the word that you hear preached and consider just how it is that you can apply it to daily living? There are Christians and after they've been converted for some time, they become so comfortable.

They settle down. They still attend church. They still listen to the preaching of the word. They may even express appreciation of it, but they refuse to allow it to disturb them.

As they hear the word of God, they may feel slightly disturbed. I must do something about this. I really must do something about this, they say. But then, after they leave the church, they speak about other things and all consideration of what they have heard is put away from them.

their consideration of it, the effect it has had upon them, their being disturbed by it, has been entirely superficial. It's so different with them now from what it was when first they knew the Lord.

[53 : 11] They're still hearers of the word of God, but they're not now doers also. There just is not that former delight in the preached word of God, that former determination to put it into practice, that former carefulness in applying it.

The gray hairs are there. Then think, too, of your private devotional life. You see the evidence of the gray hairs, too, sometimes in a person's private devotional life.

When first you came to know the Lord, when you were converted, how you loved to go into God's presence, pour over his word, and pour out your heart before him in earnest prayer.

You were so disappointed when the time came to rise from your knees and to close your Bible. You were enjoying true communion with the Lord. Your heart was in it.

It was a delight to you. My friend, is it with you the same still? Sometimes it is that after a time a person finds that his times with the Lord are quite different.

- [54 : 33] He doesn't abandon his Bible reading. He doesn't abandon his times of prayer. But now they become so mechanical, so formal, so hurried. He reads through a passage quickly, a few verses, or perhaps a chapter, and he utters some words of prayer, and then he rises and he says to himself, I've done my duty.

My conscience is clear. I've read my portion. I've had my quiet time. But there's been no enjoyment of communion with God. No sense of his presence.

No delight in the Lord himself. And in communion with him, the gray hairs are there. Then you see it too in this.

A refusal to be uncompromising. A refusal to be uncompromising. Sometimes it is true of a person that, who has been some time on the Christian way and who is slipping, that if taking an uncompromising, unreserved, unswerving stand is going to lead to laughter and to ridicule and to make things more difficult for him, then he will shy away from that unreserved and unswerving stand for principle and for the Lord Jesus Christ.

He will not now dare to be a Daniel if going on his knees three times a day means that he's threatened with a lion's den.

- [56 : 13] He would once. There was a day when he would do that. But not now. The gray hairs are there appearing upon him. And you see it too in this.

There's not that same tremendous zeal in the pursuit of holiness. It used to be true of that person that the words be ye holy for I am holy were ringing in his ears and ringing in his heart.

He would go to great lengths to discipline himself unto holiness with such self-discipline, that self-discipline that is the fruit of the spirit. He would vigorously mortify sin and pursue holiness of life.

He was so careful, so precise, so exact. But now he says to himself you're being somewhat an extremist. You're carrying things too far.

Moderation in all things is a better way. You mustn't be so extreme. Nowhere to draw the line. I'm a balanced person now.

- [57 : 20] I've matured now. And the truth is that these sentiments are but the gray hairs that are in an indication of spiritual and moral decline.

Oh my Christian friends, let us examine ourselves. Let us look into the mirror of God's word long and carefully.

And as we do so, does that mirror expose to us gray hairs on you and on me? First of all then, the evidence of this condition.

Evidence. And secondly, we notice the cause. The cause. What is the cause of such a sad and alarming and distressing condition? Why does it occur?

What leads to it? Well, first of all, worldliness. Worldliness. We're told in verse 8 that that's how it was with the Israelites. Ephraim mixed himself among the people.

- [58 : 24] You have it again in verse 9. Strangers have devoured his strength and he knoweth it not. What should have, Ephraim should have remained distinctive and different from the nations round about.

But it's not so. Ephraim has mixed himself among the heathen people. Ephraim, Israel, should have been relying upon God for everything. Israel was threatened by powerful enemies, but Israel should have been relying upon God.

Instead, Israel made alliances with the heathen nations round about. Some years previously, Israel, Ephraim, was allied with Syria, with its capital Damascus, the kingdom just to the north of Israel.

King Rezin of Syria and King Pekah of Israel, the son of Ramalia, these two kings formed an alliance against the mighty Assyria. They even invaded Judah because Judah would not join in their alliance.

King Ahaz of Judah refused to join and so that alliance invaded Judah and thousands of the people of Judah were slain in the battles that resulted.

[59 : 38] There was the time when Israel tried to buy off Assyria to pay tribute, to pay taxes. It did her no good. Ephraim also was like a silly dove without heart.

They call to Egypt, they go to Assyria. Ephraim was allying herself with the heathen nations round about. She mixed with the peoples, the heathen peoples around her and inevitably Ephraim was affected by the wicked, heathen practices of those nations.

She assimilated them and she lost what was different, what was distinctive about her, what ought to have marked Israel out as God's own possession.

Such mingling with the world, such mixing with the world always leads to spiritual decline.

The Christian is meant to be different from the world. Do not be like them, Jesus said again and again and again in the Sermon on the Mount.

[61 : 03] The church is strong when the church is different from the world. The church is pitifully weak when the church is like the world.

It is essential for a Christian for his good health spiritually, it is essential for his good that he be separated from the world.

Following the ways of the world, following and adopting the outlook and the attitudes and the values of the world leads to spiritual decline. That the Christian is called to separation from the world is a biblical truth that needs to be clearly sounded in our day and generation, in the church in our day and generation.

Come ye out from among them is the Bible's teaching. Are you taking it seriously? me? Amen. And then to another cause of this sad condition of spiritual decline is the failure to appreciate the holiness of God.

A failure to appreciate the holiness of God. God, the Lord, Jehovah, is a God of burning purity.

[62 : 24] To him, sin is utterly abhorrent. He will not tolerate it. No one can sin with impunity. The Christian certainly cannot sin with impunity.

Oh, how we need to recapture in the church today an awareness of the burning holiness of our God.

Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? We read in the book of Isaiah. And the prophet gives the answer, He that walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly, he that despiseth the gain of oppressions and shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil, he shall dwell on high.

God demands holiness from his people. Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord. We treat sin so lightly, if we had a true awareness, a deeper appreciation of the tremendous holiness of God, then we would treat sin more seriously, we would dread sin, we would fear sin, we would shun sin, we would hate even the garments spotted by the flesh.

That's a cause of this spiritual decline, a failure to appreciate the holiness of God. And then this also, pride.

[64 : 03] That's how it was with those people of Ephraim, verse 10, the pride of Israel testifies to his face. Israel had become so proud, so complacent, so self-satisfied.

That is how it was with the church of Laodicea. Jesus condemned that church for its lukewarmness.

The church at Laodicea was neither hot nor cold. The gray hairs had appeared there upon it. And why? Jesus goes on and he tells us why.

He tells us that it is because of that church's pride, because of its complacency, because it had become so smug and complacent.

The church there at Laodicea was saying I'm rich, I'm increased with goods, I have need of nothing. I'm all right, all is well with me.

[65 : 06] I need nothing more. But it wasn't so. The church at Laodicea was not all right. It was anything but all right.

What the Lord Jesus said to that church was, you are a, you think you're rich and increased with goods and in need of nothing, but what you don't know is this, that you're wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.

The church there at Laodicea was anything but all right. Jesus wasn't there with that church, he was outside the door, knocking on the door. Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in. And you know there are many evangelical people, and they too are like the church at Laodicea, proud and complacent.

We're evangelical people. We're so orthodox. We go to church every Sunday. We are not guilty of those scandalous, open, gross sins. We're a respectable people.

[66 : 14] We have it all. We're all right. We've got everything. We don't need anything more. But are we all right, my friends? Do we have it all?

Might it not be that the Lord Jesus is coming and he's saying to us, you're wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. your life is empty and spiritually impoverished.

Certainly it is true that if we're believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, then we're in the one in whom are to be found all spiritual blessings. I've preached that many times.

But is it not so often the case that we are not experiencing the glorious possibilities that are available to us in Christ?

We are not possessing our possessions in him. We've scarcely begun to possess those great spiritual blessings that are found in him. Do you know anything of the knowledge of the Lord, of the enjoyment of God, of the sense, the marvelous sense of his presence and his nearness and his love, of the glory of God?

[67 : 30] You have that vision of the glory of God, that overwhelmed and enthralled and enraptured the saints of a bygone age. What do you and I know of that?

Is it not the case that so often we're proud and complacent, self-satisfied, satisfied with a low level of spiritual attainment and a meager experience of God?

We think that we're rich and increased with goods and in need of nothing, when in reality we're wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.

Pride, it's a terrible thing. Pride, and it produces the gray hairs, it leads to spiritual and moral decay.

The cause, the evidence, the cause, but we mustn't stop there. Sadly, the cure, the cure. What can we do about such a distressing and alarming and dreadful condition if it's true of us?

[68 : 41] Is there any cure? Well, first of all, this we must consider. We must take stock. It was sad that Ephraim had appearing upon it the gray hairs, but what was sadder still was that Ephraim did not know it.

The gray hairs are here and there upon him and he knoweth not. What I'm trying to say is that we must engage in self-examination.

We must stand back and take a good, long, hard look at ourselves. we must look at ourselves carefully in the mirror of God's word and see if that mirror will expose to us gray hairs if they are there.

We are not able of ourselves to get rid of them. We will not get rid of them until God intervenes and works in us.

We will not be able to get rid of them unless we first of all realize that they are there. We need to examine ourselves. Examine yourself with regard to the preached word.

[70 : 03] Are you responding to it? Are you taking it to heart? Are you laying it up in your heart? Are you careful to assimilate it and to practice it? Are you giving attention to applying it to yourself week by week?

Give attention to your private devotional life. Take a good hard long look at your private devotional life. Are you enjoying God in private?

Enjoying communion with him? What about the stand you take? Is it uncompromising? Is it unswerving? Are you willing to stand for Christ whatever the consequences?

Are you wholehearted in your pursuit of holiness? Are you willing to put anything at all out of your life if it's a hindrance to you in the pursuit of holiness?

Examine yourself. The Lord Jesus told the backsliding church at Ephesus to remember from whence it had fallen.

[71 : 05] Remember think back to what you used to be. Recall how it was with you in better days than these. That's the first step towards recovery. That's the first step towards the cure.

Remember consider. And the second is this repent. Repent. that will involve acknowledging that the grey hairs are there.

Acknowledging that there's been the departure from faithfulness to the Lord. It will involve recognizing and acknowledging and confessing that there has been this failure of wholehearted faithfulness to the Lord.

In detail you must in God's presence confess all before him with shame, with contrition, with sorrow, with tears.

There must be mourning. Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted. That's what Jesus said. He said so. And then repentance will involve an asking of God for forgiveness.

[72 : 16] It will involve pleading with him for mercy. We can take this so lightly. It's not just a matter of uttering a word of confession lightly and thinking that we can have forgiveness continuing in sin that grace may abound.

No, no. It means pleading with the Lord that he will have mercy. And if humbly and genuinely we are truly confessing our sin and asking for forgiveness we will most certainly receive it.

If any man sin we have an advocate with the Father Jesus Christ the righteous. The blood of Jesus Christ God's Son cleanses us from all sin.

And such repentance will involve also changing course. If there is no amendment of life then there has been no repentance.

There must be a doing again of the first works. Are you responding to the word of God? The word preached in public and read and private?

[73 : 29] Are you taking that uncompromising stand again for the Lord? Are you wholehearted and zealous giving yourself with vigor to the pursuit of holiness of life?

That leads me to the third element in the cure. Consider, repent, and thirdly press on. Press on. The apostle Paul said forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before.

I press on. I press on toward the mark. I'm like an athlete, like the athlete he is saying. I'm giving to the race everything that I've got.

I'm straining every nerve. I'm holding nothing back. I'm going all out to win. I'm desiring more. I'm praying for more. I'm asking for more.

I'm seeking more. Oh, my friends, do you know Christians who at once give you that impression that they're making this progress, that they are indeed pressing on?

[74 : 35] Are you a Christian like that? If not, the gray hairs have appeared upon you. And there will be no cure until you begin wholeheartedly again to press on.

Only God can make you holy. But it is required of you and of me as Christian believers that we give ourselves with constant, diligent, and unremitting effort to the pursuit of holiness of life.

Press on. are the gray hairs appearing upon you? If so, then that's the warning sign.

Take heed. There's been a non-set of moral and spiritual decay. That's not how it is meant to be with a Christian.

I've said that already. His outward man is decaying, his outward man is perishing, but his inward man is being renewed day by day. That's how it ought to be.

[75 : 44] And if that's not how it is with you or with me, then where is the evidence that we have spiritual life in us at all? Oh, seek to have the process arrested, the process of decay arrested.

Give yourself with diligence to adding to your faith, virtue, and to your virtue, knowledge, knowledge, self control, and all the other fruits of the spirit, the graces of the spirit.

Give yourself with diligence to the cultivating of them. In so doing, you will be giving yourself with all diligence to making your calling and your election sure.

A person is justified. He is put into a right relationship with God solely by God's grace through faith alone.

And the evidence that he has been justified is a life of progressive holiness. It's a serious thing then, isn't it, if the gray hairs are appearing, and especially if we know it not.

[76 : 55] Let us pray. O Lord, our God, we thank thee for thy word. We ask now that thy word this day will search us, and we pray that we will be concerned to respond to it by thy spirit's enabling to apply it to ourselves and to act upon it.

Show to us, we pray, if this terrible, distressing condition be true of us, and we pray that we will seek the cure, that we will consider what we have been, that we will examine ourselves, that we will repent and give ourselves vigorously to pressing on in the way of holiness.

Hear us, we pray, and deny not thy blessing. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen.