

Isaiah 2:1-22
The High and the Low of Divine Visitation
by Grover Gunn

We today live in a time of spiritual weakness. Much of the church is worldly, compromising with the world, conforming to the world. The world is increasingly brazen in its sin, parading its perversity with less and less concern about modesty. Many people are rejecting orthodox Christianity and the traditional church, and are seeking spiritual fulfillment in a hodgepodge of religious beliefs and practices. In such times, the people of God are too often lacking in hope, and the worldly are too often lacking in any fear of consequences.

On the one hand, the people of God look at current trends, at the moral downgrading and coarsening of society. They see what was morally unthinkable in the relatively recent past becoming socially tolerated behavior, even socially accepted behavior. To use the phrase of the late Senator Patrick Moynihan, they see society “defining deviancy down.” The people of God look at current moral trends, and they extrapolate. With a fatalistic uniformitarianism, they assume that the present is the key to the future, and that things will inevitably get worse and worse. They assume current trends will continue, ever descending with steeper and steeper rates of descent. They assume that social institutions which are the moral fabric of society, such as family and church, will continue to deteriorate. They assume that the state will become more powerful and controlling as the last hedge against social anarchy, and that hard won political and economic freedoms will be lost. In times such as these, the people of God are tempted to lose hope.

The worldly, on the other hand, tend to lose all fear of consequences in times such as these. They are continually pushing the moral envelope, departing further and further from the moral norms of the past. They have confused foolishness with freedom, and are futilely pursuing fulfillment through partaking of the forbidden. They have partaken of one forbidden fruit after another, and they are still breathing; they are still alive; they haven't been struck down by lightning. They misinterpret God's longsuffering and patience as either indifference or weakness. What they once tried with fear and trembling, they now do with boldness. What they once did in secret, they now do openly. What they once did in private, they now do publicly. Their heart is hardening, and they are losing any sense of future accountability.

What both the church and the world tend to forget in times such as these is the concept of the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord is a time of special divine visitation. The day of the Lord is a time of dramatic divine intervention when God blesses His faithful people and judges His and their enemies. This universe is not a closed system, and history is not a uniformitarian succession of events. Things don't continue on as they are without interruption. God, who is always present, at times draws near in a special and significant sense. God, who is always working His purposes out, at times changes the course of history in a dramatic and conspicuous manner.

The climatic day of the Lord will occur at the second coming of Jesus. When Jesus returns, God will definitely be intervening in

history and changing its course. That will be the day of ultimate and perfect blessing upon God's people, and the day of ultimate and final judgment upon God's enemies. Yet we mustn't forget that there are also manifestations of the day of the Lord within history before the second coming. There are within history times of special divine visitation during which God's faithful people are revived and blessed, and God's enemies are judged.

Our passage for today is a prophecy written during a time of spiritual weakness and decay. It is a reminder that God does intervene in history, that God does visit His people, that God does revive and bless the faithful, and that God does judge the wicked. The purpose of this passage is to restore both hope for the future and the fear of the Lord.

We will look at our passage for today under three headings: last days discipleship, present day depravity and judgment day discipline. First we will look at **last days discipleship**.

The concept of last days discipleship is found in verses 1 through 4. We looked at this in detail a few weeks ago, and so I will only review these verses today. These verses predict what will happen in the latter days. The term "the latter days" or "the last days" refers primarily to the age of the Messiah, which is the age of the Christian church, the age we are now living in. This is the age of the Great Commission, the age when Jesus sends out His people to disciple the nations of the world. As we saw a few weeks ago, Isaiah 2:1-4 describes the temple mount in Jerusalem as the highest mountain in the world as a way of saying that the worship of the living and true God will one day

be the dominant religion in the world. The peoples of this world, who in ages past were under the dominion of pagan religions, will one day worship the God of Israel. They will want to learn the law of God, not as a legalistic way of salvation but as a way of life. In salvation, God will remove their rebellious spirit and will write His law on their hearts in the sense of giving them a heart desire to do what pleases God. This prophecy is fulfilled as missionaries bring the gospel to people groups who have never heard it before. This prophecy is fulfilled as churches are established in previously pagan cultures and then begin functioning as moral salt and light and thus influencing their cultures for righteousness. This prophecy is fulfilled as the Great Commission is fulfilled and as nations are disciplined and as nations come to identify with Christ and to observe all that Christ has taught.

As the nations are disciplined, they receive secondary blessings. As more and more cultures become more and more transformed by the gospel, there will be less international conflict. Nations will be free to devote more of their energy to producing food and less to preparing for possible wars.

The message of this passage is one of great hope for the people of God. The future of this world does not belong to totalitarian states which impoverish their people in order to build up military strength. The future of the world does not belong to the fanatical religions which try to impose their errors on all humanity through force and deception. The future of this world does not belong to the wicked who hope to promote social immorality and destroy Christian civilization. The future of this

world belongs to the faithful church and to the missionary movement. The foolishness of preaching is wiser than the wisdom of this world, and the church in its apparent weakness is stronger than the strength of this world. Jesus has overcome Satan, Jesus has overcome the world, and the gates of hell will not prevail against the church which Jesus is building. We must do the work of the kingdom with confidence, believing that the form of this world is passing away, that our labor in the Lord is not in vain, and that the future belongs to the kingdom of God.

Now since the future belongs to the light of the gospel, it is foolish for the people of God to be attracted to the darkness of paganism. We see that thought expressed in verse 5 of our text:

5 O house of Jacob, come and let us walk in the light of the LORD.

This challenge in verse 5 serves as a transition to our second point, which is the **present day depravity**. I am using the word “present” here to refer to the time when the prophet Isaiah wrote. Here is the irony. There is coming a day when the pagan nations will be attracted to the law of the Lord as a way of life. Yet at the time of Isaiah, the land of Judah was filled with pagan influence. In verses 6 through 9, the prophet says repeatedly that Judah was full. The picture is that of a container so full that there is no room for anything else. When we are filled with sin and self, we cannot be filled with the Holy Spirit. Judah was filled to the brim with pagan culture, with pagan thinking, with pagan ways, with pagan worship. There was no room left for the Word of God or for the Spirit of God.

Verse 6 says that Judah was filled with eastern ways and were soothsayers like the Philistines. To the west of Judah lay the pagan nation of Philistia, and to the east lay other pagan peoples. Judah has been influenced through interaction with these pagan cultures lying on her borders. She has come to enjoy the fellowship of people who are the moral children of foreign religions. Judah has adopted the occult practices of pagan peoples, practices such as soothsaying. The people of Judah may have worshipped at the temple following the rituals of Moses, but they also visited their psychic readers and their spiritualist mediums and their seance guides and their spirit channelers and their occult magicians. They tried to mix the light of the true religion with the darkness of the false religions, foolishly thinking that darkness could somehow strengthen light.

Verse 7 says that they were filled with silver and gold. They had become materialist who sought fulfillment in the amassing of possessions. They had come to measure success by the number of toys a person has when he dies. The prophet says that there was no end to their treasures. Material possessions do not really satisfy, and materialists are always wanting more. They had become dominated by the love of money, which the apostle Paul tells us is a root of all kinds of evil.

Verse 7 also says that the land of Judah was full of horses and chariots. This is not saying that a military defense or military preparedness in the face of hostile threats is something evil in and of itself, any more than silver and gold are in and of themselves evil. The verse is condemning trusting weapons as a

substitute for trusting God. The people of Judah were rebelling against God morally and looking elsewhere for security. They sensed that they couldn't break covenant with God through immoral behavior and also depend upon God to protect them. When people look to weapons to protect them apart from God's help, then "there is no end to their chariots." They can never have enough military strength, and they never feel totally secure.

Verse 8 says that the land was full of idols. The people of Judah were superstitiously worshipping images which they themselves had made. The prophet Isaiah ridicules the very idea of a person's worshipping something which he himself has made. This was the most blatant symptom of Judah's sinful ways. They were worshipping at the temple in Jerusalem, but they were also worshipping idols. They were giving to others that worship and glory which is due to God alone.

We have looked at last days discipleship and present day depravity. Verse 9 is a transition to our third point, which is **judgment day discipline**. Let's read verse 9:

9 People bow down, and each man humbles himself;
therefore do not forgive them.

The prophet says that people were bowing down and humbling themselves before idols. Because of their persistence in this sin, God was not going to forgive. The day of opportunity was over, the day of judgment was coming, and the people will be bowing down under the burden of affliction and humbling themselves in the day of judgment.

We read in the early chapters of Genesis that when Adam and Eve still lived in the garden of Eden, God would come and walk with them in the cool of the day. God was always present with them because God is everywhere at all times, but this was a time when God was with them with a special personal presence. Before Adam ate the forbidden fruit and sinned against God, these were times of great blessing. After his fall into sin, Adam dreaded the Lord's presence and tried both to hide from the Lord and to cover his nakedness with fig leaves.

The day of the Lord is when God visits people within history in a similar way. God is always present but at times He is nearer in a personal way. This is a time of great blessing for God's faithful people, a time of spiritual revival, a time of refreshing from on high. It is also a time of judgment upon God's enemies, and they try to hide from God.

Our chapter begins with the vision of the last days when the temple mount is exalted as the highest mountain in the world. The nations stream up this mountain to worship God and to learn His ways. Here in verse 10, we learn that the covenant people who have adopted pagan ways do the opposite. They do not climb to the mountain top to commune with God but rather descend into the depths of the earth to try to hide from the glorious presence of God. This futile effort to hide from God among the rocks and in the caves is mentioned three times: in verses 10, 19 and 21. On the day of judgment, the wicked will try not only to hide themselves but also to conceal their idols, which are then an embarrassment to them. Even though these

images are made of precious metals, silver and gold, the wicked discard them in the depths of the earth and abandon them in the domain of moles and bats.

All these efforts, however, are exercises in futility. As Adam discovered in the garden, there is nowhere one can hide from God. The Psalmist David expressed this truth this way:

Psalm 139:7-8

- 7 Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?
8 If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.

This thought is a comfort to the righteous but a threat to the wicked.

The day of judgment is a day when God will be exalted, and the wicked and all they take pride in will be humbled. The prophet mentions things people tend to admire or trust and states that even these will be brought low in the day of the Lord.

The prophet mentions some impressive wonders of nature, the high mountains, the cedars of Lebanon and the oaks of Bashan. Even these are not safe from the judgment of God. Within history, a volcanic eruption can destroy the side of a mountain as well as the mighty forest below the mountain. And, of course, on that final Day of the Lord at the return of Christ, “the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (2 Peter 3).

The prophet then mentions some ancient military defenses, the high tower and the fortified wall. In the day of the Lord, these will fall like the walls of Jericho in the day of Joshua.

The prophet mentions the majestic ships, which were ancient instruments of exploration and engines of commerce. In the day of the Lord, these will be threatened like that ship traveling to Tarshish in the day of Jonah when God sent the violent storm against it.

The proud motto of rebellious humanity is this: “Man is the measure of all things.” Fallen humanity thinks that they can not only survive apart from God but even prosper. On the day of judgment, God will cut humanity down to size. God will remind us that he formed us from the dust of the earth and breathed into our nostrils the breathe which brings life. We are dependent upon God for our creation, and we are dependent upon God for our continued existence. To be severed from God is death. The prophet reminds us of the worthlessness of humanity apart from God:

22 Sever yourselves from such a man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for of what account is he?

Our passage for today is a dose of reality. The real world is the world God made, and we are constantly in God’s presence. There is no way to escape from this or to avoid this. We are not ready to live with reality until we are at peace with God. The only way we can be at peace with God is through the saving work of Jesus. We must look to Him for forgiveness based upon

His death upon the cross. We must look to the suffering of Jesus as the only possible payment for our sins.

When we look to Jesus, we no longer have to fear the day of the Lord. We no longer have to fear God's interventions within history. We have peace in the present and hope for the future.

When Jesus restores the image of God within us and renews our fellowship with God, we also find our worth as humans restored. Jesus delivers us from the verdict upon humanity we find in Isaiah 2:22:

22 Sever yourselves from such a man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for of what account is he?

Jesus restores to us the evaluation of humanity which we find in the eighth Psalm:

Psalm 8:3-9

3 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained,

4 What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?

5 For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor.

Apart from Jesus, we are nothing. In a faith relationship with Jesus, we are bearers of the divine image crowned with glory and honor. And even in spiritually dark days we know that the future belongs to us.