

Acts

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 September 1984

Preacher: Rowell, Peter

[0 : 00] Thank you.

I pray that you will feel it an encouraging evening. I'm thankful for what I've heard of this past year and the encouragements you've known through it.

And our prayers are with you. The prayers of the friends at Forest Hall are with you. As I look back, I'm very thankful that God in his providence has mingled, as it were, our pathways together like this.

And so there is a very deep Christian affection that exists between your pastor and myself. And for that I'm very thankful.

Perhaps I could also mention that the collection this evening will be taken for your pastor. And although I'm sure he would not want me to say a great deal about that, it is an occasion when you can show what you feel in a very practical way.

[1 : 35] And I'm sure that you will do that. Well now this evening, as God may help me, shall we turn to the third chapter in the Acts of the Apostles.

Chapter 3 in the Acts of the Apostles, and just a phrase from verse 19. When the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.

I think there will be some here this evening who will have recollection of a previous occasion when I spoke in a very similar vein. And I believe that since that time you have known those showers of blessing and very closely linked with showers of blessing of course are times of refreshing.

In fact, the times of refreshing are the results of the showers of blessing. And I want, as God may help, this evening to speak a little on this thought and this theme.

Because these words are really a promise. The times of refreshing shall come. There is no uncertainty about this verse.

[3 : 06] It is absolutely certain promise regarding the future of the church of God and the future experience of the people of God.

Perhaps I ought to say that there have been those who have understood this verse in different ways. There have been those who have confined the times of refreshing to the times beyond the end of the world's history.

Because later on we read in verse 21 of the times of restitution of all things. Now certainly there are rich blessings to be enjoyed by God's people at and beyond the time of the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

times. But I take this expression in verse 19 to be a promise a promise which belongs to the whole of the true church of the living God and a promise that belongs to that church in every age down to the end of the world's history.

Certainly it was true in the particular circumstances of this chapter. these people to whom Peter had been preaching and Peter and John had been speaking and these people or at least some of them were people who were already beginning to experience such times of blessing.

[4 : 43] Times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. For centuries the Jewish people had been in a state of spiritual darkness and bondage and dryness and barrenness for over 400 years until the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ there had been this long dark period in their spiritual history.

But now God had appeared again. God had intervened in their national history. God had intervened most remarkably in the history of the world that God had sent his own dear son into the world and the Savior had come to give his life as a ransom as a sacrifice as an atonement for sin.

Now after the blessings of Pentecost and the powerful coming of the Holy Spirit there were already times of refreshment.

Times of outward blessing from God. Of course the earlier part of this chapter serves as a very vivid and natural illustration of such a time of refreshing.

There was that poor lame man. He had to be carried to the beautiful gate of the temple. There he had to sit and beg and wait for the charity of the people who went in and out through the gate.

[6 : 20] And along comes Peter and in the most wonderful way in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth this man is commanded to rise up and walk.

Now you see exactly the illustration of what I'm saying. There was a man in a most miserable helpless wretched state. A word from Peter the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth and this man stood up.

He was leaping and jumping and praising God. An amazing change in that man's life. Now that is the kind of change illustrated of course in that natural way.

That is the kind of change which I believe we shall see in a spiritual way when there are times of refreshing. what precedes times of refreshing?

Well this summer we've had sufficient sunshine and periods of dry weather to be in that situation where we can appreciate the effect of the rain.

[7 : 41] what happens when there is no rain? The earth becomes dry and parched living things begin to die seeds won't germinate and the whole aspect of the earth around us seems to be coming brown and shriveled up.

Now that's in a sense that's a prelude to these times of refreshing. And that may be the situation either personally in a believer's life or collectively in the life of a church or far more generally in the life of the church throughout a particular area or throughout the world even.

For historically that has been the case. there have been sometimes long periods of many years when the true church has been weak and numerically few and spiritually depressed and there does not seem to have been those evidences of divine power in anything like the same measure as at other times in history.

We are obviously more familiar with the situation in regard to our own souls and in regard to those churches that we are connected with and there again if we were honest we would have to say wouldn't we that there have been times of dryness times of spiritual barrenness times when it seems as though everything has become parched and shriveled up and in a situation like that it does seem as though what was alive it is going to die and it does seem as though no seeds germinate and nothing seems to be growing well I don't know whether that describes the situation for any of you

I don't know how clearly or precisely that may describe past experiences for you or for you as a church but I'm sure that if we're honest we do know that there have been times like that some of us have to say sadly there have been more than one occasion when that has been true ours that spiritually we seem to have got very dry and hard and unresponsive it seems as though the seed of the word can fall on our hearts and then it's falling as though it were on the wayside and the birds of the air come and it's taken away then we have to begin to ask ourselves serious questions are we really spiritually aligned similarly in the life of a church it may be that there is the preaching of the word the faithful ministry of the gospel and yet you sit and you listen and there isn't that warm responsiveness to the word preached there isn't a mixing of faith with the word that is heard and so you become as I was saying to my own people only last evening you can quickly become dull of hearing now the parched dry earth is a sad picture of people who become dull of hearing and they don't receive the word and there is no mixing of faith with the word that they hear there is no application of the truth to their own situation and there is no fruitfulness as a result of the preaching of the word now be honest friends with yourselves tonight have there not been periods like that well that's why I say

[12 : 02] I take these simple words in this verse 19 to have a continuing relevance to believers and to churches and to the church as a whole and it is a wonderful promise that we have in this simple expression that in spite of what we are and in spite of what we have been and in spite of what repeatedly we have been God is wonderfully declaring that the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord well there's the prelude in regard to the spiritual condition of things it had been like that really it had been like that until the day of Pentecost I mean there had been rich blessings through the ministry of

John the Baptist through the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ through the ministry of his called apostles but nothing really in comparison to the wonderful outburst of spiritual power and blessing and grace associated with the day of Pentecost and the days immediately following indeed the Lord had promised his apostles that they would do that they would see greater things than any that they had seen in the life of the Savior because he knew that the word of the gospel would spread from the Jewish people into all the world he knew that instead of the ones and the twos here and there instead of the twelve or the hundred and twenty there would be thousands upon thousands he knew that throughout the world eventually there would be not only thousands upon thousands but millions who would hear and who would believe that little band of believers would grow numerically would grow in influence and the teaching of that little band of men would spread and others would be added to them to be preachers and teachers until the whole world would be affected by the gospel now that is part of the promise that the Lord Jesus

Christ will not come again until he has called his people from out of every kindred and tribe and tongue and so there have been and so there will be times of refreshing now what else do we see about the prelude to these times of refreshing I've tried to describe the barrenness and parched dryness of the situation that precede the time of refreshing but when God by his spirit begins to move and to work what do we see well in verse 19 we don't have to look very far away do we repent ye therefore and be converted there are three things which I want you to notice first of all the word is preached and in this case the word was that simple fundamental gospel principle repent ye therefore and be converted there was preaching you will notice as the apostles went about preaching and teaching they seized every opportunity to speak to the people concerning

Jesus Christ when people saw the people when Peter saw the people running together into the porch that is called Solomon's greatly wondering he answered unto the people and said ye men of Israel why marvel ye at this and he goes on he has an opportunity he speaks to them of the honour and glory and dignity of Jesus Christ and then he charges them with their sin that must have been a devastating thing that he said to them you killed the prince of life it sounds a paradox doesn't it the prince of life you killed him we know by God's grace we know this that there is life by his death but that does not lessen the guilt of their sin ye killed the prince of life whom God hath raised from the dead whereof we are witnesses

I say friends they seized the opportunity to preach Christ to preach man's sin to charge the consciences of the people with the guilt of crucifying Jesus and then the preaching of the word developed in this way the command to repent and to be converted that their sins might be blotted out so that's the first thing there was a faithful powerful personal preaching of the word and when the Holy Spirit works and when there are to be times of refreshing you will find that those men whom God has called to preach the word are anointed as it were with a fresh sense of divine power they are given a fresh sense of spiritual authority they speak with a fresh pointedness they lay home upon the consciences of the people the sins of which they are guilty and they call upon them to repent and to believe and to be converted that their sins might be blotted out there is a new boldness there in the preaching of the word that is one of the characteristic features of the outpoured blessing of the

[19 : 25] Holy Spirit at Pentecost those who preach the word were blessed with a boldness that they had never known before and private individual believers were blessed with a new boldness to testify of their faith and even when persecuted and scattered they went everywhere preaching the word secondly as a prelude to those times of refreshing as it were part of the times of refreshing there is a breaking of the hard cramp there is a softening of the hard hearts of men oh friends if there is one thing that we need to pray about today it is that there will be such an influence of the spirit of God to soften the hard hearts of them oh how hard they are and let me begin right at home friends in all honesty and affection some of the hardest hearts are the hearts that have been hardened under the gospel yes there are such things as gospel hardened sins we have heard it all before that is the attitude there is nothing new in this the poor minister strives and prays and pleads with his

God that he might be able to preach with a new warmth and vigor and feeling and the people say oh it's just what we've heard before same old thing again friends there is nothing harder than a heart that's hardened like that under the gospel what a mercy when hearts that as hard as that are softened and then broken and there is repentance and you grieve for all those sinful occasions when you have scorned the word of God and the gospel has just been words then it is you begin to cry to the Lord that that precious gospel may burn into your heart and affect you again repent ye therefore because you have heard the word because the gospel has been preached to you because

Christ has been set before you repent ye therefore because he is the son of God because his word is not to be ignored the word of a gospel minister is not just his own opinion I'm not claiming any kind of infallibility I'm not claiming the kind of inspiration that the apostles have but what I am claiming friend is that if a man is anointed by the spirit of God he brings God's message to the people repent ye therefore because God has been speaking amongst his people isn't that what had happened as Peter had begun that wonderful history of gospel preaching people have heard the word repent ye therefore and be converted now it is a turning there must it is essential there must be such a turning and friends if you have never turned in this way you have never been converted if you have never turned to

God this is how the apostle expresses it they turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God and if you haven't turned in the same way you are not converted let's be simple and plain about the language is clear enough isn't it I pray you to times of refreshing will be an inward change which is fundamental and radical it is an inward chain in which a person is turned in the opposite direction his whole way of life is reversed instead of running in the ways of sin and wickedness he turns to the ways of righteousness and truth instead of serving the wicked one he turns with a heart made willing to serve the living

God he has the spirit of Saul of Tarsus when he was changed in that remarkable way and he said what wilt thou have me to do now that's the measure of true conversion yes he said verily I thought I did God's service when I was persecuting Christian believers and hailing men and women to prison and death I thought I did God's service that was the magnitude of the change in a completely different direction humbled and broken he said what wilt thou have me to do repent repent ye therefore it is an argument it is a command it is a pressing word repent ye therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out friends as long as you go on in the ways of sin and unbelief and rejection of the gospel you'll never know the forgiveness of sin you'll never know the sweet blessing of sins forgiven no friends and you won't when you come to the end of your life either and you won't when you stand before the judgment seat of

[26 : 24] Jesus Christ those who are hard-hearted and unbelieving and impenitent will receive the just recompense of their sins that's what makes these words so pressing of vital significance repent ye therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out so there's this new and deep sentence of sinfulness of personal guilt there is this new willingness to admit our sin to confess our sin to turn from our sin to seek the Lord oh how we need to pray that men's hearts will be softened how we need to pray that hearts that have been hardened even under the gospel ministry will be broken and softened in this way and they will repent of their sin against

Jesus Christ how we need to pray that in this country generally there will be a softening of men's hearts that they will be made receptive to the word of the gospel because at the moment it seems as though the vast majority of people just have no time for these things at all but the promise still stands times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord what is the secret what is the secret of these times of refreshing well friend I would say that the secret can be understood in two ways clearly in this verse preeminently in this verse there is a connection between times of refreshing and the presence of the Lord now how many here this evening could say this with absolute certainty and conviction

I know that only the Lord can really refresh my soul how many church members here would say to tonight I know I'm convinced that only the Lord can refresh his church well I hope there are a good number who can say that and without any hesitation at all with conviction in their hearts they know the truth and they say I'm convinced that if there are times of refreshing to come then they must come from the presence of the Lord now there are two things to notice in that expression the presence of the Lord it is from the

Lord that the refreshing comes times of refresh my people they are far away but I'll refresh them no friend the times of refreshing are not only times which the Lord himself gives to us but they are times which he gives to us by coming to us that's the wonder of these times of refreshing he comes in a very marked and special way to his people do you know anything about that do you know anything about the beginning of these experiences in your own soul when the

Lord first came to you in that way of first conviction in that way of initial quickening do you know anything about that you must be born again do you know anything about that or when you were born again whose life was it that you received where did that life come from what was the effect of it well again we can go to Saul of Tarsus and as he looks back over those beginnings in his life now as Paul the preacher to the Gentiles he says God who separated me from my mother's womb and called me by his grace revealed his son in me from the presence of the Lord came that blessing grace but the presence of the Lord was there it was a manifestation of Jesus

[32 : 25] Christ to him personally isn't that what we need don't you sometimes get down in your prayers on your knees and you say oh Lord come to me again restore unto me the joy of thy salvation come Lord into my life with that heavenly love and power that I have known in former day where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord times of refreshing shall come love and the presence of the Lord but there is a second thing in connection with this wonderful promise that we must notice straight away the presence of the

Lord I take to be the presence of God the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ with us the son of the father but you say he's not present with us in physical form as he was with the apostle no they had seen him go up into heaven they knew he had ascended up into the presence of his father what is this presence of the Lord then I think that's what's led some people to restrict the meaning of this verse to the second coming and the events that follow the second coming but I believe we can understand it in this way now the Lord Jesus Christ has promised to be present with his people through the power and blessing and presence of his Holy Spirit now that's a spiritual mystery there is a spiritual depth to that simple thing that I've just said

Jesus said to his disciples lo I am with you always even unto the end of the world to the end of the age Jesus was saying I am going to be with my church and with my people down to the end of time until I come again and yet he ascended up into glory they no longer saw him with their natural arms physically he had gone but you go on and read in these chapters here in the Acts of the Apostles and what is the impression you gain as you read through these chapters why friends I gain this impression that there were men here who were strangely conscious of the nearness of their

Lord the presence of the Lord and when did that special awareness of the presence of the Lord seemed to begin and to be so vividly when the Holy Spirit came and was poured out upon them in that most wonderful way so friends it's that it's that really that lies really at the heart of this wonderful blessing it is the presence of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit and when the Holy Spirit is at work in your life I believe the principal thing that will be accomplished is that you will have this personal sense of nearness to and relationship with Jesus the Holy

Spirit is that blessed third person of the Trinity by whom we experience the love and communion and fellowship of Jesus our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ there are times of refreshing precious times of refreshing precious spiritual times of life and warm and renewed vigor times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord let us look at this then in its consequences I've given you a brief as it were a brief picture of the prelude the background to this and what develops as God blesses his people in this way what are the consequences the after consequences of the times of refreshing well let me begin with the ministry what happened as a consequence of this faithful preaching and teaching well at the beginning of chapter 4 we have two results there were those who agreed that they taught the people and they laid hands on them and put them in hold until the next day there was bitter opposition how be it many of them which heard the word believed and the number of the men was about five thousand now friends when

[38 : 52] God refreshes his ministers and refreshes them in their ministry and anoints them again with that fresh oil there will be believing in the hearts of the people many of them which heard the word believed they were convicted they were brought to repentance they were pointed to Jesus they mourned over the awful crime of killing the prince of life and from that time onward knew what it was to love the Lord to follow him to serve him those will be the simple but wonderful consequence of times of refreshing in the ministry of God's service there will be a believing response in the hearts of the people because the

Holy Spirit is making the word preached powerful amongst them what about the people well I've already said something about them that believing response go back to the illustration right at the beginning when the ground is dry and hard and cracked and parched nothing will grow but you know friends when there is a time of refreshing there is a new sensitiveness it's as though you're seeing those old familiar things in a new way it's as though your heart can now respond to things which previously you just heard and they've gone by you now you're taking them home as it were to your own hearts the lives of these people are affected in times of refreshing there is a softness you know times of barren parched dryness there are all kinds of problems personal and collective all kinds of problems you get people being critical of each other you get church members being disagreeable you get all kinds of problems because of the low state of spirituality amongst

God's people oh yes they are God's people but they're in a low state but when times of refreshing come then there is a new war love you can see it over and over again in these records in the Acts of the Apostles when times of blessing came under the power of the Spirit of God there is a great warmth of affection for those who are in need and they shared things amongst themselves they had all things common yes there was a deep compassionate concern and new sensitiveness but I think friend cheapest of all and at the heart of it all there is a new war of life and love to Jesus that's it isn't it just as simple as that instead of singing do I love the Lord or no am I his or am I not there are hearts that respond and say

I know I love the Lord I know whom I have I have committed the keeping of my soul and him I know him I know his grace I prove his power to save I know his long suffering and his grace in reviving there's a new assurance oh yes not a bold hard presumption that's all part of the barrenness that's the old dryness but now a new spiritual warm persuasion and confidence friends that was the hormone of the new testament church oh yes oh I know that there has grown up the idea that it's somehow a super spiritual state to be in if you're always mourning your wickedness and your low state and your unbelief and your doubts and your fears they are real and there are times when we have to mourn over them but friends times of refreshing are times when God deals with things like the sickness of our soul he has come to heal the weak barrenness of our spiritual life he has come to revive so you will hear a different language you will hear the language of humble confidence and gracious assurance when times of refreshment shall come from the presence of the Lord many of them which heard the word believed and the number of the men was about five thousand and they weren't ashamed to own the Lord they weren't ashamed to be identified with these imprisoned men and their friends they weren't ashamed to be identified with the church of

Jesus Christ and when times of refreshing come there is an influx of members into a living church and their living soul and the Lord adds to the church daily such as should be said when times of refreshing come there is a new and deep and spiritual regard for the word of God the word of God is multiplied strange expression it doesn't mean lots of copies were copied and printed and distributed it means the effect of the word in men's lives was multiplied in the lives of others deepened in each individual the effect of the word is seen in times of refreshing then there is a new unity amongst

[46 : 30] God's people a deep spiritual bond why because because you can tell in times of refreshing you can tell who are the Lord's people in times of spiritual barrenness you look at it I was looking at some grass outside our house this morning now there were little patches of it that were very green generally under the trees in the shade that was quite green but you go out into another part of the ground and you find it's all brown you say is it alive you'd have to get down on your hands and knees to find out whether there were any green shoots there and you find it on that grass and you'll soon know that it's alive you'll recognise the light because it's green so you do spiritually in times of refreshing you recognise spiritual light in others and they recognise it in you and that is that is how the spiritual oneness and relationship and union grows because there's a recognition of God's work in another person's soul times of refreshing will make

God's people more sensitive about their way of life more sensitive about their behaviour more sensitive about their relationship with the world times of refreshing will mean that men and women are more devoted to a saviour and more devoted to his cause more self denying they will not think it an imposition to be told that they are not their own they are bought with a price no when times of refreshing come there are men and women and boys and girls who are only to glad if they can do anything to honour him anything in which they can express that love they feel for him they are not trusting in their works they are not looking to their works to save them but friends in gratitude in their hearts they are saying

Lord what can I do what will they have me to do times of refreshing friends are times when you will see the church labouring when you will see the church remarkably active now a mere activism a lot of things going on a lot of committees and a lot of meetings and so on yes that can be typical of the parched barrenness but friends real spiritual life will show itself in spiritual growth and spiritual activity and spiritual concern spiritual concern for the life and well-being of the church both locally and worldwide times of refreshing were known in Jerusalem and immediately you will see the spirit of God moving men in strange sometimes distressing ways out of

Jerusalem into all the world because Jesus said go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved and he that believeth not shall be damned times of refreshing shall come our time has gone I know let me just say one or two things more friends when times of refreshing come your meetings together will be different can't you say that's been true this past year haven't there been occasion where you would say there was something very wonderful and very sacred about our meeting it was as though when the meeting was finished you hardly dared to speak oh friends there are blessed times when our hearts are so sensitive we just want to consider him who bore such contradiction of sin against himself times of refreshing in these meetings of God's people are times often of praise and thanksgiving there have been times in the history of the church when there has been a new spiritual poetry that's something we've almost forgotten isn't it these days why have we got a hymn book what happened why friends there were times of refreshing and men and women were so affected by the truth and the love of

Christ that they expressed themselves in exalted spiritual poetry and praise and song times of refreshing shall come oh I know I know what some of you may be thinking I know that in certain parts of the professing church today there is all kind of confusion and wildness and noise and rambles I know that friend I won't I won't move from this that when times of refreshing coming there will be the evidences in every aspect of the life of the church you remember that sacred time when Jesus and his disciples had met together for that last supper they sang and hymn and went out what wonderful unity there was there as they sang those precious psalms of praise to

[53 : 55] God times of refreshing in your prayers privately times of refreshing in your reading of the word privately times of refreshing in your private conversations with each other times of refreshing in your family circle times of refreshing and communion between husband and wife and parents and children I still vividly remember an occasion years ago when in one family I knew very well two young people were powerfully called by the grace of God oh friends what a home to go into what a time of refreshing oh they are blessed times times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord and he shall send

Jesus Christ which before was preached unto you whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things yes he is coming again at the end of time but friends he is coming again in this spiritual way in the power of his spirit from time to time to time through the life of his church and bless God he is going to do that in the lives of individual believers the sovereign grace of God he shall send Jesus Christ he's been preached to you perhaps already your heart is beginning to move toward him in the preaching that you have heard perhaps you are still seeking him and you are saying Lord come and bless me as others have been blessed times of refreshing shall come he will send

Jesus Christ to you in that personal revelation manifestation and manifestation to your soul he will reveal his son in you times of refreshing shall come oh God grant that through this coming year you will know much of that blessing indeed I pray the whole year may be such a time of refreshing amen to your journey my hope and something I about many and I will please please