

GOD'S VISITATION

Lincoln Park Baptist Church, West Newton, Massachusetts

December 20, 1964

Sunday before Christmas

Introduction:

- A. At this time of the year we sing with great joy. We sense music in the air. We go out caroling. We hear special music in the stores, on radio and TV stations. And we ask: Why do we sing? Why do we rejoice?
- B. At this time of the year we think of giving: We give to our relatives; we give to our friends; we give to the needy. Again we ask: Why do we give? Why do we think of others?
- C. At this time of the year, Christian people come to church in great numbers. They want to worship together, to sing together, to pray together, to hear the Scriptures read. Again we ask: Why do we come to church so specially in this season of the year?

I believe the answer to all these questions is contained in the term "visitation". We sing, we rejoice because God has visited us. We give, we share because God has visited us. We come to church because God has visited us. But what do we mean when we speak of God's visitation?

I. Visitation in the O.T.

- A. Visitation means material blessings. When God visits his people, he pours upon them the good things of life.
 - (1) Ps. 65:9 [water] *"Thou visiteth the earth and watereth it, thou greatly enrichest it. The river of God is full of water; thou providest their grain, for thou hast prepared it."*
 - (2) Ruth 1:6 Naomi had left Israel because of famine. Then she started with her daughter-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she has heard in the country of Moab *"that the Lord had visited his people and given them food"*.
- B. Visitation means redemption: When Joseph was about to die (Gen. 50:24), *"I am about to die; but God will visit you, and bring you up out of this land to the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."*

Visitation means liberation from Egyptian bondage. The Lord had seen their affliction, had heard them and was now ready to act. Moses and Aaron were to be his instruments.

B. Visitation means judgment

- (1) When the people had sinned against God by making a golden calf and calling it God, Moses was told: *“But now go, lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them! And the Lord sent a plague upon the people, because they made the calf which Aaron made.”*
- (2) When people are sent into exile for 70 years, this is God’s visitation in judgment.

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| God’s visitation: | Blessing or judgment |
| | Grace or punishment. |

II. God’s Visitation in Jesus Christ

A. God’s visitation in the birth, life and death of Jesus

- (1) Zechariah at the presentation of John the Baptist in the temple. Says Luke 1:68: *“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people; he has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David his servant.”*

Message to Joseph: *“Mary will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”*

In the words of the prophet Isaiah: *“The people who walked in darkness saw a great light.”*

- (2) In the deeds and words of Jesus, the people saw God’s visitation in mercy and judgment.
 - (a) After raising the son of the widow of Nain from the dead: *“Fear seized all the people and they glorified God, saying, ‘A great prophet has arisen among us! God has visited his people.’”*
 - (b) Jerusalem will be destroyed, because she did not know the hour of her visitation. The Lord of glory had come and she did not receive him.

Visitation = salvation or perdition.

III. God’s visitation to individuals then and now. Response.

A. N.T. – a few examples

- (1) The Lord visited Mary through whom Jesus was to be born. She said: *“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to thy word.”*

(2) Paul – God visited Paul while he was on the way to Damascus to persecute Christians. Paul himself says: *“For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man’s gospel. ... When he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood.”* When he was called to be an apostle to the Gentiles, he obeyed. When grace came, he accepted it.

B. How does God visit us today? What we have been trying to say is that the meaning of Christmas is that God has visited us. God’s visitation is hidden.

Hidden in the small things: (a) a manger, (b) a mother, (c) simple men – sinners, the scum of society. In Congo, God’s visitation came and comes in lowliness.

When we visit the sick, when we go to prison houses, when we visit the needy and share with them our goods, when we are merciful with sinners.

God’s visitation occurs amidst the strife and turmoil of everyday existence. Amidst the darkness we see the light. In death we see the resurrection.

Conclusion:

A. God’s visitation is a present-day reality. *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him and he with me.”*

B. Behind the songs, joy and glow of Christmas, there stand:
 -- the lowliness of the manger,
 -- the fragility of human life,
 -- the shadow of the cross.

And over against this the presence of the resurrected Christ who knocks at the door of our hearts. Let it not be said that he came and we did not receive him.

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