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When God visits his people

Who doesn't enjoy the visit of a good friend? Such visits give us the opportunity to catch up on news and happenings, to refresh the friendship and recall together memorable and delightful experiences. But it's still just a visit and therefore the moment will come when it's over, obliging us to return to the daily grind. Aware of this reality, we usually try to squeeze out of the visit together everything we can.

The Bible shows us that God too, from time to time, visits his people in a special way. Such times of visitation make it possible for us to enjoy a significant advance in our relationship with him and they always bring refreshing and renewal. They also require that we be more sensitive to his voice, more attentive to the things he wants to tell us and do in us on those special occasions.

A person's life is not simply a routine where everything unfolds according to a monotonous scheme. On the contrary, life is full of hills and valleys, light and shadows. There are times when learning is easier, when we can incorporate with greater facility matters of which we were formerly unaware. Children, for example, find it much easier to learn new things than adults. Young people in love are more inclined to listen to each other than couples who have been married fifteen or twenty years. A new follower of Christ often seems more hungry and thirsty for the things of God and his word than a person who has been a Christian for many years.

Understanding this reality helps us to appreciate Jesus' lamentation over the city of Jerusalem, as recorded by Luke:

⁴¹And when He approached, He saw the city and wept over it, ⁴²saying, “If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. ⁴³For the days shall come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side, ⁴⁴and will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize **the time of your visitation.**”

Luke 19:41–44 (NASB)

With the coming of Jesus the Messiah and the announcement that “*the kingdom of God is at hand*”, God purposed to bring about a profound and marvelous change in the situation of the people of Israel. He wanted to change their funeral dirge into dancing, their sighing into song. He wanted to exchange the tablets of the law for a wonderful experience of God’s grace in the heart. He desired to restore the children to their parents and the parents to their children and make the relationship between husbands and wives more loving and considerate. He wanted to lift the burden off those who were overloaded, open the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf and, at the same time, return hope and happiness to the discouraged and distressed.

Yet no matter how compassionate and merciful the expressions of Jesus, the people at large closed their hearts to him. Following an initial enchantment, they refused his invitation to a new life of intimacy and responsibility. They could not be convinced of the advantage of leaving behind their long-held traditions in order to embrace a life of faith and surrender to the will of God.

So the door of opportunity was closed to them: opportunity to experience a new life full of adventure and projection, after which they had no option but to return to the tired routine of the past. They lost their opportunity; their brightest hope disappeared. It was now only a matter of time until they faced the inevitable consequences of their unfortunate error.



The word translated *visitation* in Luke’s text means “an occasional demonstration of divine

power” o “a visitation of grace that manifests itself as protection or loving care”. Curiously, it’s the same word that means “the bishop’s role”: that of caring and concern. The same word occurs in 1 Peter 2:12:

*Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in **the day of visitation**.*

In this way Peter exhorts his brothers in the faith to live in the world according to God’s will and holiness, so that in the day when God reveals his power and glory, others will glorify him for the faithfulness of those who were followers of Christ. Until God reveals himself in glory and power, many will not realize the value of an intimate relationship with him.



In the Greek version of the Old Testament (Septuagint), the same word appears in Genesis 50:24, when Joseph speaks of his confidence in God’s purpose for his people:

*And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die, but God will surely **take care of you** [or, visit you], and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob.”*

Here the word is translated “*take care of you*”. In this way Joseph understands that when God visits his people (“takes care of them”), their life of slavery in Egypt will come to an end.

That occasion finally arrived many years later, as we read in Exodus 3:16–17 in the words of God to Moses, when he commissioned the latter to deliver Israel from bondage:

*¹⁶Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, “The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, ‘I am indeed **concerned about you** and what has been done to you in Egypt. ¹⁷So I said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey.’”*

Here the same word is translated “*concerned about you*”. Other versions translate the passage:

“I will visit you”.



Several lessons from these texts seem rather obvious:

P **God is the only one who is able to determine the times** when he will visit us in a special way, so as to reveal to us the abundance of his grace, his care and concern, his protection.

P **It is our responsibility to be attentive on those occasions** when God works in ways that we had not anticipated, involving us in his sovereign purpose. This attitude of expectation and docility before the Lord should always characterize our relationship to him.

P **We need to understand that such a divine visitation implies a wonderful “window of opportunity”** that will not always be open. When God visits his people we are able to see significant spiritual growth and experience greater grace and enlightenment. Or we can lose it and suffer the consequences of a listless and dull spiritual existence.

God has determined to visit his people. Will we be ready and responsive to him?

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