

The Time Is Now

by C. William Fisher

The time is now for Christians to wake up and be different from the world, recapture a sense of urgency about their beliefs, and be filled with the power and fire of the Holy Ghost to win the world.

Scripture: Psalm 9:17, Matthew 3:11, John 4:35, Acts 1:8, Acts 2:4, Romans 12:11, 2 Timothy 1:6, Hebrews 12:29, James 4:8, Revelation 3:16

Topics: "Spiritual Revival", "Eternal Destiny"

Description

C. William Fisher preaches about the urgent need for Christians to rise up and make a difference in the world by being dedicated, fervent, and different from the world. He emphasizes the importance of recapturing a sense of urgency about our beliefs, especially concerning the eternal destiny of souls. Fisher challenges believers to be set aflame by the fire of the Holy Ghost, to be wholly surrendered to God, and to seek a genuine revival of religion that will energize every aspect of the work of spreading the gospel.

Transcript

"Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." -- John 4:35

It was the late President Franklin D. Roosevelt who said, "This generation has a rendezvous with destiny." Mr. Roosevelt was of course thinking in terms of politics and international relations. But his prophetic words are equally challenging on the deeper and more vital levels of morality and religion and evangelism.

Every succeeding age seems to be the most crucial and climactic of all. Yet, since Hiroshima, every thinking person has known that this generation of men is confronted with the most momentous issues and the most decisive decisions that humanity ever faced.

The preachers have been saying that for a long time. But today the military men, the statesmen, and the scientists are climbing the pulpit stairs and preaching to the whole worried world that our civilization faces total destruction, that humanity faces utter extinction unless mankind experiences a mighty spiritual rebirth.

A nation or an individual or a world does not have to reject God to be damned. All that is necessary to be lost is to forget God. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God."

If ever the world was in crisis, that time is now. If ever there was a time when men and women should fall on their knees and cry to God for forgiveness, that time is now. If ever there was a time when Christian men and women needed to pray and cry unto God -- not until they just felt better, but until their souls became so spiritually impassioned that they could go out to meet the impact of a doomed and dying world, that time is now!

There are over seventy-nine million church members in America today. But the number who are devotedly faithful and deeply spiritual is admittedly small. In far too many cases religion is not an armor but a cloak. For many of the church members of America attend the same dances and movies and taverns and night clubs as do non-church members. They smoke the same brand of cigarettes. They drink the same brand of liquor. They talk the same and act the same and live by the same rule of expediency. The number of church members is never a true gauge of the spiritual vigor and effectiveness of a nation or of a church.

Every third church member in America is a Roman Catholic. Every ninth church member is a Methodist. Every three hundred and sixtieth church member is a Nazarene. Furthermore, every sixth person in America is a Roman Catholic. Every seventeenth person is a Methodist. Every seven hundred and tenth person is a Nazarene.

A reasonable question then is this: Being so few in number and so limited in material resources, is there any possibility whatsoever that we can make any appreciable impact on the vast need of our world? The answer to that question is a glorious and thrilling affirmative!

And why? For this reason: God, in all of history, has never depended upon the vast majorities to carry out His redemptive will, but upon dedicated minorities!

What could little David do against the mighty Goliath? What hope did Gideon have against the Midianite hordes? What chance did Pentecost's hundred and twenty have against their pagan world? How tiny Luther looked against the entrenched might of the Roman church! Size never determines effectiveness, but intensity of devotion -- and faith!

There are two hundred million people in Russia today. Yet only six million are members of the Communist party. But those six million -- and more properly the thirteen or fourteen members

of the Politburo -- control with despotic power the remaining one hundred and ninety-four million people. The 3 per cent control the remaining 97 per cent. And why? Because the 3 per cent are a dedicated 3 per cent! The six million are a dedicated minority. They are dedicated to a cause -- a cause which we believe to be the enslavement of the human mind and spirit.

Six million followers of Lenin and Stalin in Russia willing to undergo any hardship! Willing to suffer any persecution! Ready and willing to die for their God-defying cause of Communism! And seventy-nine million professed followers of Jesus Christ in America, most of whom are halfhearted, lukewarm, carefree, secular-minded church members who can't be bothered over the world's lost millions!

The time for Christians in America to wake up is NOW!

The time for the godly minority to pray and plan and push and promote a great crusade for souls is NOW!

The time for revival is NOW!

If we are to succeed in that mighty crusade, however, we must give urgent heed to at least three specific areas of life and experience.

I. WE MUST BE DIFFERENT FROM THE WORLD

The only church that will meet the need of the world is the church that is different from the world. There are those in all groups who say, "If we would only soften the message and lower the standards, we could appeal to vast numbers of people who are today alienated by our message and method."

But this much is certain: Whenever any church begins to adapt itself to the world, that church soon becomes absorbed by the world! And the individual Christian who adapts himself to the world is soon absorbed by the world.

The Church has, in some areas, compromised so much and become so much like the world that the world doesn't listen much to what the Church has to say. There are those on the inside of the Church who have become so much like those on the outside of the Church that those on the outside say, "What's the difference?" And, in many cases, what is the difference?

The Church will never win the world with a compromise. The Church will never win the world by adapting itself to the world. The Church will win the world only as it remains different from the world!

When in Rome I stood in the great Colosseum looking out over the ruins of that vast amphitheater which had been the final testing ground for so many early Christians. Finally we were shown the cells where those early Christians were kept just before they were to go out to face the wild and hungry beasts.

As I looked at those cells I realized that those early Christians did not have to die -- they could have surrendered their convictions and their faith. They could have recanted and said, "We will soften up our message. We will make it less revolutionary. We will not be so rigid and inflexible in what we believe; for, after all, we're all heading for the same place anyway and we don't want to be narrow-minded about our religion." Yes, they could have saved their lives that way -- but the cause would have been lost! They could have compromised and lived -- but the cause would have died!

They chose rather to refuse to adapt or compromise with their world. Yes, they went out and soaked the sands of the arena with their blood -- but the cause lived! And that blood that they spilt seeped down and out into the catacombs and nourished the faith of other Christians and proved to the proud pagans looking on that there was, in this evil world, a

... faith that would not shrink, Tho' pressed by every foe, That would not tremble on the brink Of any earthly woe!

If those early Christians had adapted their religion and their faith and their convictions to their world, their faith and their religion would have gone down with their world. But by remaining different from their world, their cause -- and Christ's -- survived the decay and defeat and death of the Roman world.

So if we compromise with our world today, and try to adapt ourselves to its practices and principles, we can measure our spiritual decay and defeat by our success in adaptation. But if we remain different from our world, our spiritual success will be in direct proportion to our failure to adapt.

But wait! The church that has nothing to talk about but a little cluster of negatives has far too small a voice to be heard in a world crashing into chaos. The preacher who has nothing to preach except, "Don't do this and don't do that," simply cannot be heard -- and need not be heard, in the thundering of great and momentous issues.

If every movie house in the world closed its doors, if every liquor and tobacco store in the world went out of business, if every dance hall and tavern and night club and booze joint in the world ceased operations ... there would still be a great gospel to preach and a lost world to save! Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel" -- not because it was the power to preach some pet peeve, but he said he was not ashamed of the gospel because "it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." That gospel is relevant in every age!..

Men and women and young people who want to walk with God will, of course, quit all habits and amusements that are contrary to Christ. But to quit going to the movies does not mean that one is going to heaven. To quit dancing and tobacco and liquor and lust does not mean that one is really right with God. There will be people in hell who never attended the movies or the dance. There will be people in hell who never used tobacco or whiskey or beer. "Getting religion" is

more than just "quitting" something. Getting religion in its truest sense is just what it implies -- giving self and getting Jesus! That's what makes us different!

The "difference" from the world must be more than external. The Pharisees were different -- on the outside! The "difference" must be total -- both within and without. It was the secular sag of the spirit that Jesus called "worldly."

If we are to win the world we must be different from the world in heart, in life, in motive, in direction, in attitude, in emphasis. It must be a spiritual difference that is deep and sincere and positive and aggressive and dynamic!

II. WE MUST RECAPTURE A SENSE OF URGENCY ABOUT OUR BELIEFS

The early disciples did not have a policy or a program to preach or to promote. But they did have a living hold on a few vibrant facts. Or, rather, those facts had a mighty hold upon them! And the grip of truth was so overwhelming and so urgent upon their hearts that it enabled them to meet the impact of their world and turn it upside down for Christ.

There was nothing casual about the early disciples. They were never nonchalant about what they believed. They were never bored with hearing or telling those tremendous truths. They knew that Christ died on the cross. They knew that He was put in a borrowed tomb. They knew that Christ opened the doors of death and arose triumphant, saying, "I am the resurrection, and the life." They knew that He was coming back to earth again -- for He had said so! And they went everywhere telling these thrilling facts to everyone.

They spoke urgently because they knew. They knew because they experienced. They won others because they knew and experienced and lived the truth they preached!

A missionary on furlough was telling some friends that she was praying that God would let her get back to the mission field immediately. When asked if she wasn't enjoying her stay in America she said: "Yes, but when I get up and tell people here about Jesus and what He can do for them, they just look up at me as

much as to say, 'Oh, we've heard all of that before. Don't you have something new and different and funny to tell us?' And then when I go to my room I ask God to let me get back to the mission field, where people are anxious and expectant and thrilled when I tell them about Jesus and His love."

Oh, the vast numbers of men and women who will be damned through eternity because Christians were so casual and carefree concerning the dynamic truths of the gospel! Christians who kept forgetting that Christianity was not a way for nice people to become nicer, but a demanding, revolutionary, challenging task that demanded the urgent best from everybody!

A young preacher went to see that great evangelist, Gypsy Smith. The interview took place just a few months before the great Gypsy passed away. The young preacher wanted to get some advice concerning preaching values and methods.

During the interview, the old Gypsy said: "Young man, whatever else you preach, be sure to preach Jesus Christ. For men and women today are not dying to hear your opinions concerning world problems, or your pronouncements about social conditions, but they are hungry to hear about Jesus.

"But," he continued, "before you will be able to preach Jesus, you must fall in love with Him yourself -- fall in love with Him so personally and so intimately that He becomes the most real and wonderful Person in your life; so real and glorious that you will preach Jesus, live Jesus, sing about Jesus, and witness to the marvelous miracle of His grace in your life wherever you go."

Yes, the way to increased urgency in what we say about Jesus is increased love and devotion and consecration to Jesus. Those words of the Gypsy are not just good advice to preachers; they are needed words to everyone who wears that beautiful name "Christian." Oh, so to fall in love with Jesus that our Service and our testimony and our witnessing and our winning become urgent!

We are living in a world of competing faiths, and there is no hope for the person who is half-convinced. There is not a chance that anyone half-won will be able to win anyone else. We must be convinced of the truth ourselves before we can convince others.

The Communists today put most professing Christians to shame when it comes to propagating their faith. They are convinced, they are fervent, and they are urgent; while many professing Christians are casual, unconvincing, halfhearted, lukewarm -- talking of tremendous, world-shaking, soul-transforming truths as though they were piddling trifles.

If we really believe that men must be born again or be lost, let's talk as if we believe it. Let's act as if we believe it. Let's live as if we believe it. If we really believe that Jesus is the Son of God, let's talk and act and live as though we believe it. If we really believe that the believer must be entirely sanctified, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord," then let's talk as though we believe it. God help us to live as if we believe it. God help us to preach and sing as if we believe it!

Why is it that sinners can attend our services or be in our presence and feel so comfortable? Why is it that backsliders can attend our services Sunday after Sunday and not feel black and dirty and sinful? Why is it that unsanctified men and women can sit in our services month in and month out and not feel uncomfortable or needy? If Christians were more urgent, sinners would not be so complacent.

God's Punishment for Sin

We must not only recapture that sense of urgency concerning those positive truths, but we must also recapture a sense of urgency concerning those things we say we believe about God's punishment for sin.

Many times, as I look out over the congregation, I ask myself these questions: "Do you really believe in hell? Do you really believe that that man or that woman or that young person over

there and there and there who is without God is going to spend eternity in hell unless he is won, and that soon? You say you believe it, but in your heart do you really believe it? Are you going to preach as though you believe it?"

That is always a sobering question. And it is good for everyone. You, Christian mother or father, do you really believe that son or daughter of yours will spend eternity in hell? You say you believe in hell, but do you? You, neighbor, you say you believe in hell; but that one across the street or next door or in the next apartment who is without Christ, do you really believe he will spend eternity in hell? You say you believe in hell, but do you really believe in it? You, church member, church board member, Sunday-school teacher, do you really believe that men and women in your church who are without Christ will spend eternity in hell unless won to Christ and that soon? You say you believe in hell, but do you really believe in it? Do you act as though you believe in it? Do you talk as though you believe in it? Do you live as though you believe in it?

Could we professing Christians be having such an easy time if we really believed that there were those all around us who were on their way to hell and would land there unless we won them and soon? Some parents are interested in everything about their children except whether those children are right with God.

I asked a Nazarene mother about her son. I asked how old the boy was, and she told me. I asked what year he was in high school, and she told me, and also volunteered the information that her son played on the football team and really, even though she didn't like to boast about it, her son was a very popular boy at school. When I asked the lady if her boy was a Christian, she looked down at the floor and finally said, "Well, I don't know about that. You'll have to ask him."

Some parents actually take a certain pride in their children's success in fields that sometimes are absolutely contradictory to everything the church stands for. One "Christian" father and mother actually were proud that their daughter had won a school dancing contest. Apparently they didn't care whether or not their daughter went to hell -- just so she went there gracefully!

O God, help us either to put our beliefs into practice or to quit the hypocrisy of lip service! God help us to talk and act and live in the home and at school and at work and at church as if we really believed something and that what we believed made an urgent and terrific difference to us!

III. OUR SOULS MUST BE SET AFLAME BY THE FIRE OF THE HOLY GHOST.

To be different, yes. But that, sometimes, is not too difficult. To believe something, yes. But that, sometimes, is not too demanding. But to tarry until power and fire and fervency fill our souls -- ah, that is the difficult thing. Receiving the fire of the Holy Ghost always involves sacrifice and surrender and service.

The early Christians had little else but God. Many of today's Christians have everything else but God. The early Christians had no church buildings, no organs, no promotional literature, no organizational backing. But they did have the power and fire of the Holy Ghost. And having the Holy Ghost, they won their world.

Before those early Christians received that fervency, however, they tarried until they were completely and unconditionally surrendered to God -- wholly "dead" to their world, their friends, their families, and their own selfish interests. When finally they were completely empty of self, they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and the fire of the Holy Spirit enabled them to burn their way across their world.

Certainly they were persecuted. Certainly they were ridiculed. Certainly they were walled about by every tricky stratagem of the devil. But they won their world, not by the power of their brains, not by the power of their propaganda, not by the power of their promotional abilities, not by the power of their organization. They won their world by the power of the Holy Ghost! It took the power and fire of the Holy Ghost for the early Christians to win their world. And it will take that for us to win our world!

The world will never be won by cold, complacent Christians. Souls will never be won to Christ by lukewarm professors of religion. There is no power or winsomeness in dry-eyed holiness. Decency is not enough; we must be dynamic. Morality is not enough; we must move men to Christ. Cleverness is not enough; we must be consecrated. Ability is not enough; we must be all out for souls!

If ever there was a time when cold, conventional, comfortable, complacent Christians should fall on their knees and plead for a new touch of the fire of the Holy Ghost, that time is now!

"Let the Fire Fall"

One of the most dramatic sights in Yosemite National Park is the moment the "fire falls." Each evening there is a huge wood fire built atop Glacier Point. And after dark, while hundreds, sometimes thousands, of people are gazing up from the valley, someone cries, "Let the fire fall!" And that huge, brilliant mass of fire is pushed off the precipice and begins to cascade down fourteen hundred feet to the valley floor. That sight is always dramatic, inspiring, and unforgettable.

Against the gathering darkness of our day we desperately need the fire of heaven to fall upon us anew, inflaming our souls and sparking our torches and sending us out as flaming evangelists across our sin-blackened world.

O God, let the fire fall on every professing Christian. Let the fire fall today on every Sunday-school teacher. Let the fire fall on every church board member. Let the fire fall on every pastor. Let the fire fall on every evangelist. Let the fire fall on every superintendent. O God, let the fire fall on every one of us -- that is our urgent need!

The arsenal of weapons to combat sin and Satan is full and overflowing. We have the "guns" -- big and little. We have the powder. We have the men to man the machines. What we need is the fire!

We have the churches. We have the choirs. We have the music. We have the preachers. We have the schools. We have the organization. We have the promotional know-how. What we desperately need is the fire!

General superintendents, district superintendents, editors, pastors, evangelists, wide-awake and spiritual laymen all across the land and throughout the world are crying for a genuine revival of religion. Not just a little protracted meeting, not just some "special services," where horns are played and songs are sung and poems are recited and sermons are delivered -- but a genuine Holy-Ghost, heaven-originated revival that will make a difference in the lives of the people, that will make a difference in the lives of our churches, and that will energize every phase of the work!

Oh, for the outpouring of the Holy Ghost that will give power to the propaganda, and power to the program, and power to the preaching, and power to the praying, and power to push the mighty crusade for souls here in America and unto the uttermost parts of the earth!

A Challenge

In the year 1849, Garibaldi, that great Italian patriot and soldier and leader of men, stood and spoke to his ragged and hungry and battle-weary soldiers. "Men," he said, "we have gone through many battles together. You have watched your friends die by your side. You have been hit by the enemy's bullets. You have been hungry and thirsty and tired, but you have marched on. The battle now before us is the greatest of all. Everything depends on its outcome. The eyes of the nation are upon you. If you follow me it will mean hunger and thirst and forced marches and battles and, for some of you -- death. But every man who has the courage to follow Garibaldi, step forward!" And the record is that the entire company of men stepped forward at that challenge to follow their great leader into battle and to victory.

In the year 1940, Winston Churchill, another great leader of men, stood before the microphones in London and challenged the British Empire and the whole world by saying: "Ours is not an easy task. It will mean blood and toil and sweat and tears, but we will fight on -- and we will never surrender!" With those challenging words ringing in their hearts, freemen around the world girded themselves for battle -- and victory!

At this very moment Jesus, the peerless Christ, is standing before each soul saying: "You who wear My name, you who claim so much through Me, you who sing pretty songs and preach beautiful sermons about Me, the war with sin and Satan is at this moment raging in full fury. Souls, immortal souls, are this very moment being defeated and damned. If you really love Me as you say you do, if you really love My cause as you claim you do, fall on your knees and tarry there until you are ready and willing to follow Me up and down the line where fallen men and women need redeeming grace, and then help Me as I lift the broken and sin-blasted souls to the merciful arms of a loving God."

Oh, may we hear His challenge! May we accept His challenge and fall upon our knees and tarry there until our souls are filled with His passion and His love and His burden for the lost and the wounded and the dying!

Paraphrasing Mr. Roosevelt, we can say with terrible urgency and realism, "This generation of Nazarenes has a rendezvous with destiny." Never before have so few been confronted with so great a responsibility!

May God have mercy on our souls if we fail in this our day of opportunity! May God in heaven have mercy upon us if we, who profess so much, continue to do so little!

The time for action is NOW!

The time for a revival is NOW!

The time for a mighty crusade is NOW!

May Almighty God help us in this crucial, climactic hour to rise up and accept the challenge and go out with the help of the Holy Spirit to follow Christ in bringing lost men and women to the great loving heart of God!

Few in number? Yes. Limited in material resources? Yes. But as a minority with Heaven's backing, let us be a faithful minority! A God-centered, God-directed, God-empowered minority that is so dedicated, so consecrated to the one task of winning souls that God can use us as the human instrument in turning thousands from sin and destruction to Christ and salvation!

If we are faithful in that task, we will have the high honor of one day being included in that small band of surrendered soul winners of whom a Greater than Churchill will say, as He surveys heaven's redeemed, "Never in the history of the war against Satan and sin 'have so many owed so much to so few."

Prayer:

O God, forgive us if we sit back content, complacent, and dry-eyed in this hour of world crisis. Forgive us if we go on about our business as usual in this hour of church crisis. Forgive us if we are unmoved and unconcerned over a world of doomed and dying men. May we this moment, O God, realize that the hour is late and that the need is urgent and that the time to be stirred and burdened is now. May we feel, O God, the pulse of this sickened and sinful world and then bring the diseased and the dying to that healing "fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins, where sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains." This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

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