

# Evangelistic Conference 1978

by Clifford Hill

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*The speaker calls for national repentance and evangelism in the face of spiritual warfare and moral decay, and sees the current time as a great opportunity for evangelism.*

**Duration:** 35:13

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 32:7

**Topics:** "Evangelism"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by describing a thrilling and dangerous experience of being pulled along in a speeding vehicle. He then relates this to the current state of evangelism and the youth scene, stating that it is a great opportunity but also acknowledging the need to be realistic about the situation. The speaker draws parallels to the prophet Jeremiah, who was in prison when he was asked to buy a piece of land. The sermon then transitions to a brief analysis of the nation's political and economic struggles, as well as the social and moral spheres of life. The speaker emphasizes the polarization in inner city areas and encourages the audience to think deeply about the underlying causes of these issues.

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## Transcript

I want to begin by picking up the words of Scripture from Ephesians 6, where Paul is speaking about the real nature of the battle. As he sees it, it's not against flesh and blood, against human beings, but against the principalities and powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness. Paul sees that the real source of the battle is against the spiritual forces of wickedness that have gripped our world.

Now, I believe that that is one of the most penetrating analyses that has ever been made, and that it is utterly relevant to our situation today. The most ancient system of philosophy was dualism, which depicted the world as being engaged in a battle between the forces of light and the forces of darkness, the forces of good and the forces of evil. I believe that if we are rightly to discern the signs of the times today, that ancient battle is reaching its climax.

The battle in our modern technological society, industrial, urban-based communities, is not seen in the same way as it would be in third world countries or in pre-industrial periods in our own history. We are a very sophisticated people, and the battle, therefore, has all the overtones of sophistication that you would expect in technological man. Now, how do we analyse the forces that are at work in our society? Anyone can see that Britain is sick.

You've only got to turn on your TV. You've only got to open the newspapers. You've only got to look at the glosses to see massive evidence that our country is very sick indeed.

But just how sick? Is it terminal? Just what is going on in our nation? And what are the underlying causes below the symptoms or the phenomenology of our society? I want to attempt in these opening few minutes, before looking at the way ahead, to do a brief analysis. Now, I know that I shall not do this justice. I can only skim over the surface in a few minutes.

But I hope that at least these thoughts will be sufficiently provocative to enable you to go on thinking. I believe these are the lines along which our thinking should be directed. And I'm going to look at this under two headings.

The first is politics and economics, and the second is the social and moral spheres of life. The political struggle in our nation is being polarised in the inner city areas throughout Britain. These are the areas with which I myself am most familiar.

Those of you who know my background know that I've spent the whole of my working life in the inner city areas of London, the downtown, depressed, decaying inner city areas where all the social problems imaginable are coming into confluence. And I have seen from the inside the battle for power that is taking place and that is reaching its climax. Many of you will know that for seven years I was senior lecturer in sociology in the University of London.

Most of my colleagues were Marxists, and I myself at one time was a Marxist also. I'm not ashamed of my background, brethren. I believe that the Lord takes your background and the whole of your experience when he transforms your life, as Jesus has come into my life, and he uses that experience in his work.

Having lived and worked in the camp of the enemy, I know how the enemy thinks and moves and plans, and I believe that that can be of invaluable service to the Lord. The forces of evil that are at work in our society today are determined to bring down the whole system of government in our land. You see the struggle most clearly in industry, where in every part of industry there is a struggle for power.

In Ford's, just recently, we have seen a major strike, and that strike was not really about achieving a higher standard of living for the workers. Ostensibly, this is always so, but underneath the real battle is a battle for power. There are men of violence who are determined so to shake the whole system of government that the day will come when they will be able to seize power.

In the East End of London, where I've lived for the past eight years, we have been watching the polarization of political extremists, the National Front on the one hand, the international socialists, and the whole consortium of Marxists and Maoists and Leninists and anarchists and the rest of them on the other hand. The forces of the right, reactionary forces, claiming a law and order banner, racists and a mixture of other people, all going under similar umbrella banners, and the forces of the left on the other hand. We've seen marches and counter-marches, demonstrations of every kind.

We've seen violence, stabbings, killings. But the underlying battle is a battle for power. And the greatest ally of the forces of evil is apathy and woolly-mindedness.

Just a few days ago, I was speaking to a friend of mine who's a Baptist minister in the East End of London, who lets his hall regularly to the international socialists for their regular weekly meetings. And I said to him that we are not too far off a revolution in this country. Oh no, he said, I don't think that at all.

They're not highly organized enough. Why, he said, only last night the IS canceled their meeting. He said, they're always doing this.

They're just not organized. And I said to him, that is not a sign of disorganization. It is a sign of high efficient organization.

I said to him, I will guarantee there was a strike somewhere yesterday. And at a moment's notice, they canceled that meeting, and they were out on the picket line somewhere. Well, he said, now you come to mention it, you're absolutely right.

Newham social services came out. All our social workers were on strike. All the residential institutions, children's homes, old people's homes, and so on, had picket lines outside.

And he said, as a matter of fact, as I came up to town to the meeting this morning, I passed a picket line outside one of the residential establishments, and I thought I recognized one or two of the faces, and I didn't think they were social workers. He was absolutely right. They are not.

On every picket line in the country, the cell groups in each area cancel their meetings at a moment's notice, as soon as there is industrial trouble, and they get out on those picket lines to support the workers, to strengthen the gap between management and workers, to foment the issue, to sow their propaganda, to move forward to the time when channeling and making use of the apathy and woolly mindedness of the masses of this country, a mighty demonstration in London will not end at Trafalgar Square, but the day will come when they will go on down Whitehall. That is their objective. Make no mistake of that.

And we may be very much nearer that day than many of us in this country realize. Now, what of the social and moral spheres of life? Here also, the forces of darkness are gathering. The social life of Britain is crumbling at its very foundations.

Today, the challenge to authority that began with the rise of the pop culture in the 1950s is reaching a climax. In the 1950s, the whole youth scene began to explode. But as the emphasis has gone more and more upon young people, and as in every way they've begun to dominate the social scene in this country in a very subtle way, the influence also has moved away from the young people themselves to those who are ready to exploit the youth scene.

It is the young people, or so they think, who dominate the fashion world today. And the world of consumer goods, in records, top of the pops, in electronic equipment, in clothes, and in every other aspect of consumer marketing. But it isn't the youngsters themselves who are really dictating the fashion in the market.

It is the exploiters, those who stand to make the greatest gain and profit. It is the forces of evil that are making use of the very freedoms and the social revolution that has taken place in our generation. Now, I am certainly not decrying the emphasis upon youth in our society.

It can be, and should be, a wonderful, liberating force, bringing new vitality and creativity into a nation that was tired and worn out through two massive world war struggles. It was right and good that this should take place. But you have to have standards.

There has to be a yardstick against which you measure when you are throwing out all traditions, when you are challenging authority. There has to be a final yardstick of truth by which you measure the good and the

evil. But if you reach a point in social change where there are no yardsticks and where everything is changing at the same time, you are in ultimate danger.

With censorship gone through the liberalizing reformers of our society, pornography pouring onto the market, and big business concerns, massive profit-making undertakings underlying the whole movement, our society, the very health of our society, and sanity of our society, is being threatened as never before. The proceedings from Minehead, which our whole country seems to be wallowing like pigs in their own mire, is a mirror of our society. Now what is happening in basic sociological terms is this, that we have reached a point in history where the processes of social change have been moving at such a rate that we are reaching a point of climax.

You see, there is a basic sociological dictum that you cannot have change in one of the major social institutions without it affecting all the others. It's like lining up tin soldiers on the floor, on a table, or matchboxes, you know, and you tip over the first one and then they all go over like this, bong bong bong, right the way along the line. If you make a change in one social institution, all the others are affected.

There are five major social institutions in every society. The family, the economy, education, law and government, and religion. These are the big five that support the whole social structure.

If you imagine society, any society, just think of, we're thinking in terms of modern Britain today, if you imagine society as a great building, one of these huge tower blocks that you see in every city today, that is propped up, built on stilts, you often see them, built on massive pillars. If you imagine our society as being built on five major pillars, the family, the economy, education, law and government, religion. The building, if you like, is the superstructure.

The pillars here of these five major social institutions are the substructure, and below that are the foundations, and the foundations in sociological terms are the value system of the society, the value system on which the substructure and then the superstructure is built. Now, if all those five major social institutions are changing at the same point in history, you will get massive and radical and rapid social change, so much so that the very foundations itself will be shaking, the whole value system is shaking. This is what we have in this country today, and we have reached a point that has never before been reached in any society, no sociologist has ever experienced this before in any society.

Therefore, no one can predict the outcome, but again, if basic sociological theory is any guide as to the result, we can only say that it will end in the disintegration of our society. Now, what will happen first of these two alternatives in the social structure, the forces of evil? Will it be bloody revolution, or will it be social disintegration? No one knows. But there is a third factor in our analysis of the situation that faces us today, and that is that it isn't only the forces of darkness that are on the move, the forces of light are also on the move, and so for our third factor, we look at the spiritual life of our nation.

All over the country, there is massive evidence that the Spirit of the Lord is doing wonderful things. I have only been in this job with the EA now for just over two months, but already in that time, I have been amazed and delighted at the wonderful evidence of the Spirit of the Lord at work all over our country. Never before for 50 years has there been such a responsiveness in this nation.

I believe that the tide has already turned, but that many of us haven't yet recognized it. Here, I imagine that I'm speaking to those who have recognized it. Perhaps it is in the churches themselves that the recognition is slow coming.

Never before have so many attended missions as in very recent times. Never before has there been such an eagerness in the last 50 years for hearing the gospel, and I believe that it is because of the very forces of darkness that are reaching a climax in our society, that ordinary people, non-Christians, are anxious and more and more are gospel hungry and are looking to Christians for a lead. The Spirit of the Lord is just doing wonderful things.

Six churches in Derby, who were non-evangelical tradition, have become renewed in the last year. Large numbers are attending missions in every part of the country. The Lord is at work, and we are praising him for that.

In the youth scene, in almost every university and college throughout Britain, the largest organizations are Christian. Hundreds attending Bible study groups and prayer meetings. The meeting that's been arranged for the Albert Hall, Battle Royal, on the 6th of January.

I believe the date was only announced, a few weeks, and all the seats were sold out for the Saturday night. And then extra session has been laid on, two extra sessions, the Friday night and the Saturday afternoon, in order to meet the demand. Everywhere the youth scene is beginning to bubble.

I believe that today is the greatest opportunity for evangelism that we've had for 50 years. At the same time, I think we have to be realists and recognize the situation that we are in. Now, I believe that the situation we have today is very similar to the one in which Jeremiah found himself.

Do you remember the story in Jeremiah 32, when Jeremiah was invited to buy a piece of land at Anathoth? He was in prison at the time, and his cousin came to him and said, would he buy this piece of land? And Jeremiah had already had prior warning from the Lord that this was to happen. And no doubt, the people who were sitting around him in the court of the guard wondered what on earth would be the reaction of the prophet. Locked up as he was in a prison dungeon.

Locked up because he proclaimed the word of the Lord faithfully in his generation, and that word was an unpopular word. Jeremiah could see that the whole national life was crumbling. That there was evil and decay, moral and spiritual and political at the very heart of the national life.

And he could see that the enemies who were already encamping around the gate of Jerusalem would prevail. That it was a false hope for men to say that Jerusalem is the holy city. God would fight and protect it.

He'd never let it fall into enemy hands. The city had already fallen into enemy hands. The moral and spiritual decay that was at the heart of the nation, the forces of evil, were already dominant in Jerusalem.

It was no longer the holy city that symbolized the presence of the Lord. Ichabod was written over it. Glory departed.

And Jeremiah could see the inevitable end was one of physical destruction as well as moral and spiritual decay. Unless, unless there was national repentance. And for that word he was shut up in prison.

Then came this request to buy a piece of land. Well nobody, nobody was buying and selling land in that day. Who but a fool was going to buy a piece of land that was already held in enemy occupied territory.

But when the request came, Jeremiah was told to buy that piece of land. So he very solemnly, in front of witnesses, weighed out the money, took the deed of covenant, and he signed it in the presence of those witnesses and said, put this in an earthen jar, an earthenware jar, that it may be preserved for a long time. The word of the Lord doesn't change.

Now Jeremiah bought that field because he was staking a claim in the renewed society. He saw that the time of destruction had to come, but that the day of the Lord would also come. And while his task was in the first place to pronounce doom on the old order in the name of the Lord, he also declared his faith in the renewed society that only the Lord could bring about in the time of the resurrection of Jerusalem and the resurrection of God's people.

If you like, we are at the stage now, if I can offer you a little modern parable, in the life of our nation, where we're being driven along or pulled along helplessly by the forces of darkness. Have you ever been towed in a car? It's a feeling of helplessness you get, isn't it? You sit at that wheel, and you're absolutely dependent upon that driver in the car in front. We're a bit like that in our modern society.

You know, if you can just imagine getting into a little car that just won't go, and you're being towed by a big vehicle, and at first you trust the driver, and it's fun being pulled along. You haven't got to do anything yourself. You haven't got to supply any motive power.

You've just got to steer the thing, and it's quite exciting, but gradually the speed increases, and you wonder what he's doing. And as he gets faster and faster, that vehicle in front seems to change from a friendly symbol to a of danger, a symbol of evil, and you begin to be pulled helplessly along. You grip that wheel tighter and tighter, and even the very scenery seems to change from friendly lanes.

Suddenly, it seems you're winding your way along a tortuous mountain track with a sheer cliff edge, a drop of thousands of feet at the side there. One false move, and you'll be over. You're going faster and faster, and you feel that any moment will be your last, that you cannot possibly negotiate the next tortuous bend, and at that moment you just cry out, Lord, help me, and it seems that at that very moment from just nowhere, a stranger appears who cuts with one death stroke that tow rope that keeps you chained to that vehicle of death that's pulling you towards destruction, and in a moment too, it seems he's in that vehicle beside you, actually helping you to apply those brakes, and brings it to a standstill, and with his own strength, he turns that little vehicle round whilst you are just so amazed and dazed with shock that you can't even think rationally what's happening, and in the next moment, you discover that he's actually got the engine going.

How did you do that, sir, you say, and he says, I filled you up with power. It's my power that you need, and you find yourself going, this time in a new direction, and you know that it isn't your power, but his power that is driving you now. You're under new management.

That's what I've experienced in my own life, and I believe that that's what we need to experience in the life of our nation. If it can happen in individual lives, it can happen in our national life too. We have to break, we have to allow the Lord to break that chain that keeps us enslaved in bondage to those forces that are pulling us towards inevitable destruction.

Wesley, with his beautiful economy of words, speaks about how Christ breaks the power of cancelled sin. That's it, in a nutshell. Brethren, I want to now move into evangelism in the 80s.

I believe that this is the greatest time of opportunity in evangelism that we have had for many, many years. At the same time, I believe, as I've already outlined this morning, that we stand in the greatest dangers to our national life. That is the urgency of the task.

I believe that we need to mobilize the whole resources of the body of Christ in evangelism today as never before. I believe that we need a coordinated program of evangelism. Now, I am not saying to you that I'm coming here pleading the cause for a nationally directed movement of evangelism.

Oh, no. I believe in the sovereignty of the evangelist who is under the direction of the Holy Spirit, but I believe in the need for coordination. We can no longer afford the luxury of independence and of competition with one another.

We are on the Lord's side, and we are together, and we need to act as a team. The whole body of Christ is a unity. That is the only scriptural basis for evangelism, for ministry.

The eye cannot say to the foot, I have no need of you. We need each other, brethren, and we must recognize that the Lord gives different gifts to each one of us, and we need to affirm one another in ministry and not be in competition with each other. I believe in the local church as the key to evangelism, so I am not saying to you that I believe that the conversion of England will take place if we have some great center and some enormous outreach for two or three weeks, and the evangelization of Britain will be complete.

But I have already said that I do not believe that many of our churches have recognized that the tide has turned. I'm finding an exciting picture of evangelism as I go around the country, but a depressing picture in many of our local churches. I do not yet see that our churches are ready, many of them, to receive new converts in the Lord, so that we have to do a twin task, a task of preparing the local churches, preparing the barns for the harvest, if you like, teaching the methods of personal evangelism, discovering the gifts that the Lord has distributed amongst each local congregation, and mobilizing the resources of the body of Christ in the local scene, and at the same time, building up the climate of evangelism nationally with a nationally coordinated program of evangelism.

We need to share with one another news of what the Lord is doing in Cornwall, and in the northeast, and in the southeast, and in every part of our land. We need to pray for one another, to affirm one another, to support one another. We need to see where the gaps in ministry are.

Now, one of the things that I have done, that has been asked for by evangelists, as I've met you and talked to you recently, is to ask you where you are planning missions during the next year. And as I've done this, and begun to put the thing into perspective nationally, you can see where the massive gaps are, and you can also see where the concentration of evangelism is. The concentration that you can see around Manchester and Liverpool, for example.

Great things should be happening there in 1979. But such a picture also begins to show us where there is need of extra effort in evangelism. And this is where I believe that a conference such as this can have enormous significance in the life of our nation.

The EA Council, just two weeks ago, took a decision on the recommendation of the Evangelism Committee to sponsor a national congress in evangelism in 1980. We believe that the Lord is saying to us, now is the time for a national outreach in evangelism. And that national congress, that is to be organized

for some 8,000 people, and a week after Easter 1980, is designed to be a launch pad for a decade of evangelism.

It is not to be the be-all and end-all of evangelism. That isn't the task at all. It is to be an inspirational launch pad to send us into the 1980s with the spirit of the Lord upon us and into a coordinated program.

And it may very well be that in the 1980s, 81 or 82, we shall need a national crusade of some kind. Everywhere I go, there is a desire for this. I'm looking for guidance from the Lord, especially from this evangelist conference today, to test the climate, to see how the Lord has been leading you, what He's been saying to you, so that we can advise the Council of the EA who must give a lead to the country in these matters.

Today is the day of the greatest challenge to the very foundations of our national life ever in our history. I believe it is also the day of the greatest opportunity for the Lord. We need to pray that the Lord will fit us and enable us and empower us to seize this mighty opportunity that may never be given to us again.

We need to pray for great things, to expect great things of the Lord. When you ask great things, He is a God who has the power to give us all that we ask and more abundantly, exceeding abundantly, than we could ever ask.

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