

Pattern for Survival

by Hugh C. Benner

Dr. Hugh C. Benner's sermon calls the Church to recognize its spiritual challenges and invites a return to fervent devotion to Christ for survival and revival.

Duration: 19:47

Scripture: Matthew 7:7, Matthew 28:19-20, John 10:10, John 14:23, Revelation 3:14-22

Topics: "Survival"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the message to the Church at Laodicea in the book of Revelation. The sermon begins with a discussion of the divine indictment, which accuses the church of lacking full development in their devotion to God and his work. The preacher emphasizes the importance of the Holy Spirit's revelation and the limitless power of God. The sermon then moves on to the divine promise, which is represented by the statement 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock.' The preacher applies this promise to the current state of the Church, highlighting the challenges it faces from worldly influences and the need for unwavering devotion to God.

Transcript

This message by Dr. Hugh C. Benner is based on Revelation 3, 14 through 22, and was preached at the Sunday evening service of the 1960 General Assembly. Dr. Benner served the Church of the Nazarene as pastor, educator, musician, and general superintendent. He was born in 1899.

Early in his ministry, he taught at Trevecca, Eastern, and Pasadena Nazarene colleges. He pastored churches in Santa Monica, California, Spokane, Washington, and at Kansas City First. He was selected to be the founding president of Nazarene Theological Seminary in 1944, an assignment that he used to shape a whole generation of Nazarene pastors.

He also served in the general superintendency from 1952 until 1968. John W. Gardner, the president of Carnegie Corporation of New York, wrote this recently, The survival of the idea for which this nation stands is not inevitable. It may survive if enough Americans care enough.

This was not a preacher talking. This is a man high in the realms of men. He knows well, as we are beginning to know, that with little or no hindrance, vast and mysterious forces move across this world of ours, which would destroy every fundamental American concept, including the Church.

For these forces are godless forces. They're taking advantage of any situation, any time, anywhere, under any circumstances, to promote what they want in the world. And they do it with no semblance of morality, for they are not troubled in the least by any conscience or by any standard at any point.

And so secular and religious leaders alike are projecting their patterns for survival. They are calling for a return to the principles and the attitudes that made our country and other free countries progressive and strong. You say, but did you come here tonight to lecture to us about conditions in the world only to this point? To help us to realize, if we have not realized it, and to understand it more fully, if we have had some concept of it, that the Church is caught in this situation.

And the day has long since passed when the Christian Church could take for granted her continuation as an effective and growing force in the world. For the Church faces all these forces, forces of paganism, that infiltrate into life, and even into the very homes of our countries, a great, open, blatant worldliness that would destroy every spiritual value, a sweeping materialism that has become almost the basis for judging everything. And I say, my friends, the Church of the Nazarene is not immune to the influence of these forces or to the character of the day in which we operate.

You all are familiar, I am sure, with Revelation 2 and 3, those two chapters which represent the messages to the seven churches. And here is a most discriminating characterization of the Church. Written to these seven churches, there are those who have felt that it represented a prophetic sequence, beginning with apostolic times, coming on down through the various eras and periods of the Christian centuries, down even to the time of the end.

There are others who feel that it represents various basic kinds of churches. Or they may feel that here are portrayed the fundamental problems faced by the Church in all the centuries. Some years ago, I made quite a study of this for myself, and I think I see there good reason to believe that there is a prophetic significance in these various messages to the churches.

One thing is crystal clear throughout those messages, and that is this, that God's appraisal and God's judgment is on a spiritual basis, that when it comes to the point of God dealing with the Church, nothing else matters much but the spiritual. I wonder if you have thought how true that was of the ministry of Jesus. He didn't talk much about things.

He talked about spiritual elements and spiritual truths. And have you thought lately that the early Church had little to say about things, about things material? You don't find much concerning material things in the New Testament generally. Once in Ohio, a little mention here and there.

But the great issues are spiritual issues, and these messages close with this message to the Church at Laodicea. I want you to think of this message with me for just a little while. It begins, as I have indicated, on an extremely serious note.

I have three things to present in this portion of the message. There is, first, the divine indictment. There is, secondly, the divine counsel.

There is, thirdly, the divine promise. I want you to think about these for a little time. The divine indictment.

What is represented here? First of all, the accusation of a lack of full devotement to God and to His work. Neither hot nor cold. A kind of middle ground that has no issues particularly in any direction.

It represents works without any soul passion. It represents a religion that has no emotion in it. It represents activity without zeal, a kind of formalism gripping everybody.

It represents routine without life. And I tell you, friends, whenever those conditions begin to exist, they will be neither cold nor hot, and they will come under the judgment of God. For God says, I can't stand people like that.

I can't take a church like that. I cannot recognize people who will try to straddle the whole situation and be neither cold nor hot. And I was thinking as I was studying this, whatsoever is not of faith is of sin, is sin.

And I tell you, here is represented what we might call a kind of sinful religion. Not necessarily because they do a lot of evil things, but because they are trying to carry on a religion for which they pay no personal price. Carry on a religion that is all routine, that is all formalism, that has no grip and no heart and no feeling and no passion in it.

And they have felt that if they would go through certain forms and certain routines, they'd make it through. God says, I'll have nothing to do with that sort of thing. That if you're going to be lukewarm, I'm through with you.

What else? Distortion of values, distortion of values, rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing. Here's your materialism, worldly standards of value, people satisfied with means rather than ends. People who are content to live for secondary issues rather than those things by which men live or die.

They had lost their first love. They had lost the fellowship with God. They had lost communion with God.

And I would remind us all here tonight that the first element that is lost by the spiritual church never is works or labors or orthodoxy or promotion or organization. They can continue to be tops all along those lines, but it is love that they lose first. The radiance, the romance, the blessing, the joy, the spiritual attractiveness.

There is where the spiritual church begins to drift and lose out. And long after they've lost the radiance and the power and the joy, they can carry on the machinery all right. For that takes no particular hard interest.

That takes no particular passion. That takes no particular consecration. Oh, do you see it? Lack of full devotement, a distortion of values to where they have missed the point of spiritual things.

And the loss of spiritual reality so that they still go through the forms, but have not the power thereof. I read in Revelation 19, 8 concerning the bride and to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints. So that it's not only a matter of inner purity, but it is a matter of an outworking in life of righteousness and true holiness.

Said, you not only need some pure gold, you not only need some good clean white clothes, but he said, you need some eyes there. Something wrong with your eyes. I tell you, there is illumination in Jesus Christ.

There is illumination in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, opening blind eyes. You know what's the matter with a lot of the church these days? They don't see much of anything that they ought to see, for they are blind to spiritual truths and all don't believe that we're immune from it. For unless we behave

ourselves, we'll be blind from it too.

The only solution is this divine eye salve that straightens up the eyes, that gives them vision, that takes away the blindness and makes them to see the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. I can't tell you how it works, but I know it works. I found the time when I was reading the word of God and it was all a great deep mystery.

It was all a great deep puzzle. It was like an enigma and I didn't know what to do with it. But as I read and studied and read and studied, suddenly a flash of inspiration came.

I knew it wasn't anything I did. I didn't know any more than I knew before, as far as I was concerned, but the Spirit had revealed something. Aren't you glad we're not dependent upon ourselves, our poor weak minds, but we have a mighty God who says, I will reveal myself to my people.

Praise the Lord. Oh, I get happy every once in a while because we're not limited to the human level. Aren't you glad of that? And that brings us to the divine promise.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. You say, wait a minute, that's to be preached to sinners. Well, I know it always has been.

And I thought I'd get a little help from the commentaries and I read a few of them and they all talked about sinners. But when I began to read this again, I saw it wasn't written to sinners at all. It's part of the message to the church.

It may not fit with your ideas, but that's the way it appears to me. Written to the church, the picture of Jesus Christ standing at the door of his church, trying to get in, seeking an entrance, trying to get inside there so that he can do something with them and to them and through them. And oh, my friends, it is on that basis that I find the pattern for survival, the pattern for the survival of the church in any age, in our age, very old fashioned, but sufficient.

What does he say? He said, I'm standing at the door knocking. Aren't you glad he's there? Aren't you glad he's not going off somewhere saying, find me if you can. He said, I'm right there.

Whether you want me or not, whether you ever do anything about it or not, I am at the door. I love the church. I want the church to be all she ought to be.

And I am here and available. What does he say? Oh, friends, I wish I could get it to you like I feel it. I wish I could get it to you like I think Jesus feels it.

If any man, church, if any man hear my voice and open the door, oh, he'll never crash the door either into any heart or any church. Here is our responsibility. Here is the element of our initiative.

Here is the point where if anything happens, we must start it. We must make the invitation. And that ought to lead us to recall that there are no great inevitable revivals or awakenings to come.

There's not going to be a God to come. It will come only when we open the door. Disobedience, carnal disobedience, carnal quenching of the spirit.

He said, if you'll open that door, I will come in. I wish I could say that like I feel it. Oh, I see the vision of the answer to the church's problems all through the ages.

What was the answer in apostolic times? It was not in beautiful buildings, for they didn't have any. It was not in a lot of money, for they didn't have much money. It was not in esteem and in prestige, for they didn't have it.

It wasn't in a lot of highly trained people, for they didn't have them. It wasn't in a lot of clever methods, for they didn't know anything about them. But I tell you, Christ came in.

By the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Christ came in to that apostolic church. And if you don't believe they made it, read the Acts of the Apostles again. Oh, what happens to a church when Jesus comes to church? Something happens to the spiritual life when Christ is revealed.

There is spiritual power that begins to move in that church when Christ is manifested to that church. There comes an evangelistic effectiveness. They wonder almost where it came from, but it comes when Jesus Christ moves in the midst.

And oh, I'm glad there's another part of this text and this message. For he does not only say, if any man will open the door, I will come in, but he says, he that overcometh. Oh, here, my friends, is the reminder that we're in a struggle, that it's not going to be a pushover, that we're going to have to fight against the world and the flesh and the devil, but that in the midst of materialism, in the midst of worldliness, in the midst of crass paganism, in the midst of all kinds of materialistic pressures, in the midst of formalism, in the midst of distortion of values, there can be those and there can be groups who will have victory in Jesus.

For I read, I will grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father in his throne. The quadrennium just ahead could well be the most significant and faithful quadrennium in world history. I'm not a pessimist and I have not been known to be a pessimist, but I think we ought to be realists concerning this whole world in which we live.

And in the while the light of world conditions, my friends, it seems to me that some way about this time, not only in this assembly, but clear across our church, we ought to set ourselves with every means at our command to this pattern for survival, to begin to give to God an unqualified unqualified, unequivocal, unquestioning devotion that says, let the world think what they please, let others do what they may, we go with God. And I would go back to paraphrase the quotation from John Gardner and read it thus. The survival of the idea for which the church of the Nazarene stands is not inevitable.

It can and will survive and prosper under God if enough Nazarenes care enough. We don't have to be like the Laodiceans. We can start halfway through that and say he's coming in and we're going to overcome.

Christ is going to live in our midst and we're going to have the victory. Praise the Lord. Whatever others do, friends, let Nazarenes be among the overcomers.

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