

# A Few R's - and Repent!

by Vance Havner

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the times and knowing what God's people ought to do in light of the promise of our Lord's return.*

**Duration:** 28:49

**Scripture:** John 6:66

**Topics:** "Repentance"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of understanding the times and knowing what God's people should do. He highlights the promise of the Lord's return and the need for revival in the face of an anti-Christian world. The preacher encourages believers to do more than just be faithful, but to actively engage in spreading the message of the Gospel. He references the story of Gideon as an example of someone who had a burden for the times, desired to see God work, and was aware of his own weakness. The sermon emphasizes the need for individuals to take a stand and be a catalyst for change, starting with a few dedicated individuals.

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## Transcript

...and his Bible knowledge made him an effective preacher. Here is Dr. Vance Havner this evening with a few R's. First Chronicles 12.32, we read that the children of Issachar had an understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do.

You will observe that these people had a knowledge of the times, but they also understood them. There are men today who know a lot about what's going on, but they don't know what to do about it. I suppose that one of the outstanding characteristics of this age, believe it or not, is ignorance.

Never had more school, never had more ignorance. A lot of it's educated ignorance, and that's what makes it still work. Our Lord said, ye do err not knowing the scriptures or the power of God.

When a man doesn't know the scriptures and the power of God, he's an ignoramus. Maybe a PhD, but in his case that only means phenomenal dirt. These children of Issachar had an understanding that produced a knowledge, a knowledge of what to do.

It was practical knowledge, a knowledge of what God's people ought to do. So you have a remarkable combination there in that statement. They first of all had a knowledge, and then it produced an

understanding that in turn produced a practical knowledge of what God's people ought to do.

I heard of a certain business firm some time ago that decided to take out group insurance. Everybody agreed but one man. No, he didn't want it.

And the boss said, I'll take care of him. So we went over to him, said, I hear you don't want to take out company insurance. That's right.

Well, is that your tool kit there? Yes. Well, lock it up. And is that your lunch box? Yes.

Well, close it up and go on out through the office and pick up your check and keep on going. Why, the fellow said, I'm ready to take out insurance, ready to sign up right now. Well, the boss said, why didn't you do it earlier? Well, he said, I never had it explained to me that way before.

So I believe in an explanation of the scriptures that gets the Lord's people to do something. And if we are to understand the times and know what God's people ought to do, I think there are four considerations that need to be kept in mind. And first of all is the promise of our Lord's return.

The church missed the road when she quit looking for the king to come back and started building the kingdom down here. Of course, there is a spiritual kingdom which is not meat and drink but righteousness, peace and joy and the Holy Ghost. Mind you, it starts with righteousness.

Plenty of people are interested in the peace and the joy today, but not many interested in righteousness. Too many are like a man with a broken arm who doesn't want it set. He only wants a shot to kill the pain.

Many of them come to church like that. They don't want to get right, be right, do right. They only want something to ease the pain.

But there is a visible kingdom. The kingdom of God is the reign of God in the hearts of men, but there will be a visible kingdom not brought in by education, legislation or reformation. The king will set it up when he comes back.

And if we understood that, there wouldn't be so many misguided souls riding all kinds of queer bandwagons trying to bring in a counterfeit millennium, superimpose a false kingdom of heaven and a profane paradise on an unregenerate society. You've read about Rip Van Winkle. You know how he went to sleep and slept through a revolution.

Not the only fellow who ever did that, of course. When he went to sleep, George III was the ruler of America. And when he woke up, George Washington was president of the United States.

Rip didn't know the difference, started hoofing it up for the king, almost got put in jail. He was hollering for the wrong George. We've got a lot of people today hollering for the wrong George.

You might as well try to explain a sunset to a blind man or play music for a deaf man. You might as well try to catch sunbeams with a fishhook or talk nuclear physics to a monument in the city park as to talk current events in the light of the Bible to the man on the street who doesn't read the Bible. You're casting pearls before swine and that which is holy to the dogs.

It's impossible to understand any issues today out of the context of the overall purpose of God in history. World peace, the ecumenical movement, the new immorality, whatever. These are all pieces in a jigsaw

puzzle that you never can assemble if you leave out the centerpiece.

The world's not going to be converted. It ought to be evangelized. It isn't going to be Christianized.

Constantine tried to Christianize paganism and wound up paganizing Christianity. He didn't Christianize it, he just Constantinized it. And we're trying to do much the same thing today.

Any and all of our schemes and projects to create a kingdom of heaven out of unregenerate men are doomed from the start. The Chinese have a proverb, you cannot carve rotten wood. And you cannot fashion anything enduring out of unregenerate humanity.

Oh, we need old Will Rogers again to size up a lot of things that are going on today. When the first disarmament conference was being held in England, when we threw away battleships and had to build more later, Will said they might get somewhere over there if it wasn't for human nature. I don't know any better way to put it than that.

The only way to understand the meaning of history is in the light of the two advents of Jesus Christ. Otherwise, what we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history. The early Christians were not only ready, they were expectant.

When I hear somebody say, oh, of course, I believe in the Lord's return, I know then that it doesn't make much difference to him whether the Lord ever comes back or not. When he says of course, you don't want to say of course about that. It ought to move us more than that.

Dr. Campbell Morgan used to say, I never lay my head on the pillow at night without thinking before morning comes. The final morning may have come. The early church went out with the glorious proclamation of Christ's come, in the prospect of Christ's coming, and in the power of Christ's contemporary.

Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever. Dr. Hinson out on the west coast years ago preached a great sermon on the Lord's return. Some students in the crowd didn't see it that way.

After the benediction, they came to him and one of them said, Doctor, we just can't get that out of the New Testament the way you preached it this morning. The old doctor said, of course, you can't get it out. It's in there to stay.

And it is in there to stay. A.J. Gordon believed in the Lord's return and it was said of him, advocacy of that doctrine cost him much. It seems to awaken suspicion and lead to estrangement this great doctrine of hope.

Dr. Gordon says it's not wanted by a church with millionaire merchants and by great universities, but it was for the assertion of this doctrine that our Lord was crucified, Matthew 26, 24. When our Lord got around to saying, I'm coming back, then is when the storm broke loose in all its fury. But while we look for the Lord's return, are we to sit with folded hands waiting to be rescued by his return? No.

So there is a second consideration, promise of his return, the possibility of revival. And I mean the revival, a visitation from above, God coming down in the latter reign of spiritual awakening. There have been such great visitations as in the days of Wesleyan, American revival, the Welsh revival, the Shantung revival in China.

Most of us have never seen a revival. Therefore, we're a little handicapped in talking about this sort of thing. Oh, we've seen some local revivals in churches maybe or on a college campus, but we've not seen God visit the land in such a mighty way that multitudes moved before him like a wheat field before a summer breeze.

And yet I must say that a revival doesn't have all the answers. Pentecost was a revival, but it didn't convert Jerusalem. We had a revival before the Civil War.

There was a revival before the Korean War. It doesn't solve everything. A revival's a good deal like a sale in a department store.

It's more spectacular, but the main business is done in the daily merchandising the year round. Pentecost was a great day, but Jerusalem went right on to judgment. Revivals make headlines, but when the books are added up at the last day, I think it'll be found that the main work was done by the faithful preaching of ordinary preachers and the daily witnessing of ordinary Christians, so winning in the Sunday school and in the home.

But we do need a great revival, and while we cannot produce it, we can pray for it, prepare for it. In one of the smogs out in Los Angeles, the meteorologist said only a wind from elsewhere can dispel this condition. Well, beloved, the world is smog-bound.

We're living in conditions of low visibility, mangroves in polluted darkness, and politically and morally we're living in a blinding haze. Black and white have been smudged into an indefinite gray. What was once clear is now fuzzy and indistinct.

The other day, a certain college in its advertisement said we have over 3,000 students. They meant to say in our midst, but they left the D out, and it said we have 3,000 students in our midst. Well, there are a lot of them in our midst today, if you believe me, and only the breath of God can dispel this miasma that grips mankind, and only the Holy Spirit who came like a mighty rushing wind at Pentecost can scatter the fog.

But let me change the figure a moment. I saw a sign on a church bulletin the other day. The lowest ebb is the turn of the tide.

Things are at pretty low ebb today, and the next thing on the program is a turn of the tide. But what that tide will bring, I don't know. It can bring the return of the Lord, revival in the church, or if it doesn't bring one of those two, it will bring retribution, the judgment of God, so along with the promise of the Lord's return.

And the possibility of revival is the prospect of retribution. If the Lord carries and revival does not come, there will be the judgment of God. America is at a Belshazzar's feast, and that feast, you remember, was characterized by revelry, revelation, and retribution.

We're on a national binge, and if things keep on like they're going, we'll have to swap the eagle as our national symbol for a vulture. When Billy Graham was collecting the awful statistics for his book, *World Aflame*, his wife Ruth looked over his shoulder, and she saw the growing list of awful conditions in this land. She said, well, if God doesn't judge America, you'll have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah.

True. Then there was revelation. God's writing on the wall today, and thank God there was one man who understood the times.

If you're going to be popular in Babylon today, you have to learn how to talk out of both sides of your mouth and walk both sides of the street and be an expert in the art of almost saying something. John the Baptist knew how to reprove a king, but he wasn't up on communication, dialogue, and public relations. He wasn't a guest in Herod's palace.

He was a prisoner in Herod's jail. And certainly we wouldn't think of calling Herod a fox as our Lord did. Your modern Daniel in Babylon is quite at home in the Feast of Belshazzar.

Thank God at the original Feast of Belshazzar, there was a queen who could say, there is a man who knows what time it is and can read what God's saying. I'm glad Daniel didn't get up scared half to death and say, I can't read it. Too many prophets and too many pulpits today cannot decipher the heavenly hieroglyphics.

They can't read the writing on the wall, and others try to cheer up everybody by saying it has no special significance. I'm glad Daniel didn't read something else. He could have.

They wouldn't have known the difference. There are prophets today who read out of God's revelation what never was in it. And the average American is so ignorant of God's word, he wouldn't know the difference either.

I'm glad Daniel didn't read just part of it. There are prophets in Babylon today who are afraid of the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth. God had a man who could read it, read it all, read it right.

I know Daniel is not popular in some circles. I know that the companion volume to an outstanding commentary today says that Daniel ought to cure us of predicting the future since he tried and failed. I know we've been misled by those who make Daniel's fourth world power to be Greece instead of Rome and never see any further than Antiochus Epiphany.

But my Lord said, whoso readeth Daniel, let him understand. And read Daniel we will, and make our way through the Babylon of Revelation 17 and 18 till Babylon's no more. And then we'll join that innumerable multitude in Revelation 19 singing hallelujah for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

God grant us some prophets in Babylon who can decline the table of Nebuchadnezzar and disregard the decrees of Darius and stand at Belshazzar's feast and read to this frightened generation what God's writing on the wall. We're a little short on prophets today. I have ransacked libraries.

I've looked everywhere for material on the New Testament prophet. You ever try to find anything on that? It's practically nonexistent. We have pastors and teachers and evangelists, and thank God for all of them.

We never have had many prophets, and there is no prophet at present discernible on the horizon. And I'm not talking about the foretellers, but foretellers, men who speak for God to the nation and the church. When I stand before a group like this, particularly where there are many students, I always breathe a prayer that somewhere in the crowd there might be some lad who will take up the challenge and dare to speak for God in the prophetic function today in the best sense, the New Testament sense, of the word.

The prophet tops the list of Satan's most hated men, and every demon offers a prize to destroy him. He's a disturber of the peace. He's a Daniel who keeps Darius awake all night.

He's a John the Baptist who spoils for Herod the pleasures of a king's palace. And he's without honor in his own country, scorned by the scribes and the object of the hatred of all Jezebels. Little religious clerics complain because they can't control him.

His contemporaries stone him, and the next generation builds a monument in his honor. He's acceptable to no board, no committee. He thinks out his strategy far from the petty bickerings of ecclesiastical politics.

His policy is not determined by swivel chair experts. He's accused of living in an ivory tower, but the trouble with most of us is we're out too close to see the whole field. We can't see the forest for the trees.

The prophet's a man apart who sees the whole panorama, and we're short on prophets today. Barclay says the settled ministry began to resent the intrusion of these wandering prophets who often disturbed their congregations. The settled ministry always tends to resent the itinerant evangelists.

Prophets are not popular. Where is public appreciation the test of any preacher? Whether they hear or whether they forbear, they shall know that a prophet hath been among them. Certainly we're living in a day that cannot endure sound doctrine because we've come all the way from heartburn to ear itch.

And in a time like that, people are not ready to receive the truth. The prophet won't draw a crowd either. It's not the business of the preacher to fill the church.

It's the business of the preacher to fill the pulpit. It's the business of the church members to fill the church. My Lord preached his crowd away in the sixth chapter of John.

It's not our business to make the message acceptable. It's our business to make it available. It's not our business to see that they like it.

It's our business to see that they get it. The prophet is a square, and he's an odd number in a standardized, collectivized, regimented society. He walks alone.

He's a poor mixer. He's not popular at clubs and luncheons. Amos was not chummy with Jeroboam II.

Amaziah didn't have much use for Amos at Bethel. Organized institutional religion and the voice of dissent, you have it all the way through the Bible. Elijah and Carmel, Omaikeya, our Lord and the Pharisees, they're not popular in king's palaces.

They're not wined and dined by Ahab's and Herod's. You remember that Elijah faced Ahab, and Ahab said, Art thou he that troublest Israel? And Elijah said, You got the shoe on the wrong foot. You're the one that's troubling Israel.

Ahab was the troublemaker. Elijah was the troubleshooter. We need troubleshooters today.

Businessmen, business firms employ such men to look for bugs in the machinery and prevent breakdowns. God needs such men in the church. New Testament prophets, divinely equipped for the job.

They have an instinct for locating trouble and a genius for exposing it. And naturally, they're not popular. It's much more pleasant to be a Gamaliel, keeping everything quiet in Jerusalem, than a Paul exceedingly troubling Philistine.

Such men are called troublemakers, but they don't create the situation. They only reveal it. If you call attention to the bushels and the beds that smother our Christian testimony, you shouldn't be accused of making the bushels and setting up the beds.

They do not put delinquent Christians on the spot. Such Christians are already on the spot. We need some sanctified troubleshooters today.

There's trouble aplenty, not much demand. Prophets are too disturbing. They're a contradiction to their generation.

They cause general uneasiness. They play havoc with the serenity school, and they irritate the tranquilizers. And just when the false prophets of the peaceful coexistence school have lulled everybody to rest at ease and sound, here comes a prophet to blast the neighborhood with a siren that cries aloud and spares not.

And while the scholars are writing wordy volumes that nobody reads anyhow, the prophet says it in a colorful paragraph. Oh, you say, but doesn't the Bible say blessed are the peacemakers? Yes. But the surest way to have peace is to deal with the troubles that prevent it.

A sick man doesn't have any peace because he has trouble, and the doctor has to be a troubleshooter before he's a peacemaker. May there be somewhere even now in America, in the backwoods, maybe, a solitary lad who will walk in the prophetic succession and be a troubleshooter from Tekoa like old Amos was long ago? And is it too much to hope that there may yet arise in the sunset of this age a prophet of the Lord besides, such as Jehoshaphat had in mind? Are we too far gone to pray that however unthinkable such a calling may seem to the average seminarian, some hearty soul will see to it that the prophet shall not perish from the earth? The book of Revelation tells us of a final babble in ecclesiastical and political. It'll be man's last civic masterpiece, the counterfeit of the New Jerusalem that comes down from above.

I didn't get into the Futurama at the World's Fair, the General Motors Futurama, but I like the one that John saw on Padmas. We're living now in the preliminary stages of the last chapter of that drama, and even Dr. Torrance of Edinburgh said the 660th is the number of so-called Christian civilization without Jesus Christ, the number of every attempt to organize this world in a form that appears marvelously Christian but is in reality anti-Christian. We're living in Babylon, what we need a Daniel.

So while we await the return and pray for revival and face retribution, what can we do about it besides just be faithful? I hear that everywhere, all you can do is be faithful. Is that all? Well, I think we can do a little more than that. I don't think this is a day to proceed on a business-as-usual program.

I hear services sometimes announced as usual. Maybe that's what's the matter with us. We need to get on an emergency basis.

The hour is too late and the need too great to go about it as though we had a thousand years in which to do it. The urgency ought to match the emergency, and we ought to quit living ordinary lives in these extraordinary times. So I leave with you another hour, along with the promise of his return and the possibility of revival and the prospect of retribution.

I believe that God would have us think seriously about the program of the remnant. And I believe God wants to rally a master's minority, the church within the church, a faithful few, a task force, a spearhead of expendables, a dedicated minority scorning the values of this world and living under stringent discipline.

You remember Laodicea.

He said, I'm about to spew you out of my mouth, and he did because Laodicea disappeared. But he had one more proposition to make. If anyone will hear my voice, I'm gathering the assembly of the anyones.

I do believe that our Lord may be about ready to spew institutional Christianity out of his mouth. But he's gathering the anyones. Dr. Torrey used to say, in order to have a revival, let a few members of any church get thoroughly right with God.

Small groups are springing up all over the religious world today. Of course, they are all a variety, good, bad, and indifferent, but the principle is sound. We've been trying to do it the extensive way.

Maybe the time has come to do it the intensive way. We've been trying to do it the big way. Maybe God wants to do it the little way.

We hear a lot about mobilization, and most of it's mobilization. Gideon's 300 is a classic example. He started out with 32,000.

God said, it's too many. You will take the credit. So they got rid of 22,000 cowards and 9,700 callous and had 300 committees.

And that's just about the ratio in any day and generation. We have too many soldiers today of the kind we have for the kind of battle we're out to fight and the kind of victory we're out to win. Gideon had too many of the wrong kind.

Now, if he were out in ordinary warfare, he'd have needed 50,000, because the Midianites were like grasshoppers all over the place. The church is in spiritual warfare. The battle is the Lord.

The weapons of our warfare are not torn. The average runner, the middle church member, knows absolutely nothing about spiritual warfare, couldn't care less, and Ephesians 6 is a foreign language to him. Yet I hear people say, if we only had more members, more money, more methods, we have too many now of the kind that most of them are.

And as far as statistics are concerned, you know there are three kinds of lies, white lies, black lies, and statistics. And if we won, if we won with such a mob, we'd take the credit for it, as God said to Gideon. We're not going to win this battle by a motley mob of cowards and careless, but by a nucleus of the consecrated and the committed.

We have the unreached multitude on the outside, and we have the faithful minority on the inside, but between the two, there's the unfaithful majority in the church. And we must do something about that crowd, that the first business of the church is not even evangelism, but to get ready for evangelism by revival within the church. The only strategy that'll work today is this, the rallying of a Redeemer's remnant.

We're trying to set the backlog on fire first. You can't do that. You start a fire with kindling wood, as Mr. Moody said a long time ago in one of his meetings that didn't build up very fast, and some of the preachers said, Mr. Moody, it's slow going.

Moody asked, how do you start a fire? You start it with a few. You start it with kindling wood. If you're going to try to set this backlog of unconverted and undedicated church members on fire first, you'll never have a fire.

Begin with the few. But we're going to have a Gideon's band. We must have a Gideon.

It must begin with somebody, preferably the preacher, but if not the preacher, it could be anybody. If anyone, it could be the janitor. If anyone.

What kind of a man does this Gideon have to be? Well, he ought to have a burden over the times. If God be with us, why has all this befallen us? He ought to want to see God work. Where be all the miracles that our fathers told us of? He ought to be conscious of his own weakness.

My family is poor in Manassas, and I'm the least in my father's house. He must be sure he's destroyed the altar of Baal. The dearest idol I have known, what e'er that idol be, help me to carry it from its throne and worship only thee.

No preacher can lead the church within the church if he has an idol in his own heart. Marshall Foch said, the battle is always won the day before. Gideon's battle was won the day before.

You know that from the record. God's battles are won the day before. Gideon won his by his concern and his consecration and his commitment and by his cooperation with God in eliminating the unfit and concentrating on 300 who met this.

Now, I don't mean that we're to excommunicate the unfaithful. Don't mean that. Fact is that in the last part of the seventh chapter of Judges, that 31,700 came in on the last of the battle.

If we began with a dedicated minority, I believe others would eventually join us and come to the help of the Lord against the mighty, but don't start with them.

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