

As for Me

by Vance Havner

Vance Havner emphasizes the necessity of personal commitment to serve the Lord amidst societal pressures and mediocrity.

Duration: 29:56

Scripture: Matthew 23:13

Topics: "Compromise"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher references historical figures like Patrick Henry and Joshua from the Old Testament to emphasize the importance of making a firm decision to serve God. He highlights the challenges faced by Joshua as he led the Israelites into the promised land, dealing with a wavering and easily swayed multitude. The preacher also mentions the example of the apostle Paul, who remained faithful to his calling even in the face of persecution and imprisonment. The sermon encourages listeners to make a firm commitment to serve God, regardless of societal trends or the actions of others.

Transcript

I stood in that old church in Richmond where long ago Patrick Henry fired a verbal shot that was heard around the world. It was on March the 20th, 1775, a day when centuries were crowded into hours. One man who heard that speech made a request that after he passed away he might be buried on that spot, and that was carried out.

Patrick Henry cut a knot that cautious souls were trying to untie. The Olive Branch men of his time were trying to work out a compromise of peaceful coexistence, although the term hadn't come into use, with George III. But Patrick Henry was fed up with finagling, and that red-headed Virginian saw no sense in further negotiations.

He said, I don't know what others will do, but as for me, give me a liberty or give me that. The die was cast, and the Rubicon was crossed, and all bridges were burned, and retreat was impossible. There wasn't any uncertainty about where Patrick Henry stood.

He cleared the air and stated he should. There weren't any third dimensions and middle ground. Such a speech as he gave is awfully out-of-date in this fuzzy day of woolly thinking, when experts in double-talk, in the art of almost saying something, specialized in a straightforward way of dodging the issue.

Nobody coached Patrick Henry on how to mix black and white into indefinite gray. His yea was yea and his nay was nay. And while contemporaries were going around their elbows to get to their thumbs, Patrick Henry decided that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points.

His speech must have shocked the school of caution, but he detonated a charge that blasted tyranny from our shores. In the 24th chapter of Joshua you have this same phrase. Our minds go back to the Old Testament and Joshua, the great leader of Israel.

They were over in the promised land by now. Through many dangers, toils and snares they had already come. But he faced a vacillating, irresolute, hesitating multitude, easily swayed this way and that, one day singing the praises of God and the next day dancing around a golden calf.

It was an hour of decision, and he gave a résumé of how God had led them to this good hour. After all that rundown of divine blessing, he asked Q. G., make up your mind this day whom you are serving. I don't know what you are going to do, he said, but ask for me and my house where you will serve the Lord.

I've told you in time past how that once riding on a train as a young preacher, I wasn't too settled on what I wanted to do and go and what the Lord had in mind for me. I encountered Dr. R. A. Torrey on his way to Charlotte, North Carolina, sitting over there by himself looking for all the world like a prophet out of the Old Testament. I walked over and sat down beside him, and he never wasted words telling me who I was.

I don't think that registered much, either. He looked at me and said, What are you doing? Well, he ought never to ask that, because my report card wasn't too good at that time. I told him, Well, I'm interested in this a little and that a little, and tried to account for myself as best I could.

He looked at me with those steely eyes and said, Young man, make up your mind on one thing and stay with it. Many times I've gone up to Montrose to speak and have climbed that hill and stood at his grave at the epitaph. I fought a good fight, finished the course and kept the faith.

Thank God for a man who could look me in the eye and say, Make up your mind on one thing and stay with it. Well, Joshua said, I've made up mine. I don't know what you're going to do.

And if ever we have had a weak-kneed generation swayed by the world, the flesh, and the devil, it is today. If ever there was a time when fathers like Joshua need to say, It's for me and my house, whatever the neighbors on the block may do, and however they may live, and whatever society may do, and whatever the trend may be, and the style and the fashion of the lan crowd, it's for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. It never was so difficult as it is now, with families going to pieces all over the land, when the law of God is disregarded and standards of decency and morality have been thrown in the wastebasket.

Our homes have cracked up until from Maine to California. It ought to be declared a disaster area, home-wise. People can't get along, can't stand each other.

I heard of an old couple in a rest home, and she couldn't hear very well, and he wanted to cheer her up a little bit. He said, I'm proud of you. She said, Hey! He said, I'm proud of you.

He said, she said, I didn't get it. He said louder, I'm proud of you. She said, Oh, I'm getting tired of you, too.

Well, it oughtn't to be that way. Discipline is a forgotten word, and any man who takes a stand like Joshua will be called puritanical and Victorian and an out-of-date square. I'm dumbfounded at the way parents who used to stand with Joshua have surrendered to the age and invented all kinds of excuses to rationalize their defeat and the behavior of their children.

But I also know some parents and some families who are still saying, thank God, as for us, we'll serve the Lord. And they are making a go of it, in spite of the devil. If it ought to be done, it can be done.

Never forget, you can do anything you ought to do. Anything that God wants you to do can be done. We come out of some preacher's school with loads of learned lumber in our heads and never know what to build out of it.

We are taught to doubt it as though it were the height of ignorance, not to be sure of anything. You've heard of the bed of Procrustes. If a fellow was too short, they stretched him until he would fit it.

If he was too long, they chopped him off until he would fit it. There are those today who want to stretch the scriptures or lop it off to fit the Procrustean beds of their own interpretation, judging the book and forgetting that the book is going to judge us. It's either absolute or it's obsolete.

I like the way Dr. Phillips says, the remarkable thing about this Bible is that when you start exploring it, you feel like an electrician wiring an old house where the power has not been cut off. You might get a shock. We want teachers who can appeal to our curiosity, entertain, not edify.

We don't like dogmatic preachers. I do. I go to church and I like to be able to have some idea of what the man is trying to say.

When I get sick and go to the doctor, I want a dogmatic doctor. I don't want him to say, I could be this and I could be that and I'll give you these pills and if they don't kill you, we'll try something else. I want a dogmatic doctor.

When I get on that plane at 3 o'clock this afternoon, I don't want that pilot to say over the loudspeaker, we're going to try something new this afternoon. A preacher and a Christian stands out in vivid contrast to the age in which he lives. Whatever this world or even most church members do about these things, but as for you, you're supposed to be something different.

Just how different should a preacher be? How different should a Christian be? Everybody wants to be different the day they say it, and never were people more alike. We've never had so much mediocrity and monotony in all history. I live across the street from the University of North Carolina, a great place.

I walk over the campus and when the holidays come, I have plenty of walking room over there. And I look at this generation in blue jeans, it makes me think of when I was a country kid hoeing corn down in a hollow. Only we had better blue jeans.

And you could tell the boys from the girls. I've often thought what would happen if some charming, feminine sweetheart of the twenties would meet a hippie these days looking like Rip Van Winkle after his long nap. I know the way the movies like to portray the preachers, but preachers don't dress like that anymore.

Surely they've found that out by now. Somber parson in dark attire. I never even saw them much in my early days.

We never thought of calling them by their first name. I don't care for the term reverend, but at least it did indicate some respect. Now we're at the other end of the line with Madison Avenue go-getters and back-slappers and talking and acting and looking like anybody else, laughing at all the civic club jokes, sipping seven-up at the country club.

The prophets today are dressed in snappy sack clothes. And the Church and the world are working overtime destroying the old image of the minister. And of course we all know that he's no holier by wearing a solid black suit all the time, nor is he necessarily unholy, because he puts on colorful attire.

But we're erasing all the distinctions between clergy and laity and making the preacher just one of the boys, which he isn't. As run-of-the-mill as any John do in a carpool on Monday on his way to work, the devil is out to smudge all the black and white into indefinite gray. Dr. Jowett said, we are tempted to leave our noontide lights in our steady to move among men with a dark lantern which we can manipulate to suit our company.

We pay the tribute of smiles to the low business standard. We pay the tribute of laughter to the fashionable jests. We pay the tribute of easy tolerance to ambiguous pleasures.

We soften everything to a comfortable acquiescence. We seek to be all things to all men. We run with the hare and hunt with the hounds.

There is nothing distinctive about our character, wearing gray when we mix with the businessmen of the congregation, talking gray in conversation with them. Now, that is a very dignified and a very able English minister saying that, not somebody just out to find fault. A preacher is not supposed to be one of the boys, not one of us, supposed to be ahead of us a little bit.

Follow me as I follow Christ, Paul said. If he is the life of the party all week, he cannot reprove and rebuke and exhort that crowd on Sunday with any effectiveness. He said, Jesus ate with publicans and sinners.

Yes, that's one that's been overworked here lately. When he came to announce the kingdom, first to the house of Israel, yes, but he drew near to the cross. He ate only with his own and appeared after that only to his own, and acts, presents a different picture.

But the image of a preacher is not a pose that he strikes, trying to act according to a dramatized version of himself. If he is what a preacher ought to be, the image will take care of itself, and it will be said of him, as the Shunammite said of Elisha, I perceive that this is a holy man of God, which passeth by us. No, God is not out to save this civilization, he is taking out a people who ought to be a.... I know that King James says peculiar, and that doesn't mean odd, and some of them are, but that's not what that means.

We are a purchased people. The civilization itself, In a sad time, I used to say civilization is going to the dogs, but I have quit that out of respect for the canine kingdom. The other day a motel put out this sign that changed their policy and said dogs will be allowed and welcomed.

I said, after all, no dog ever got drunk here. No dog ever set the place on fire with a cigarette. No dog ever left without paying his bill.

No dog ever stole our blankets. You know about the lady who said, I don't know what this world is coming to, somebody got in our house and stole all my holiday-eating blankets? And then under this, after welcoming the dogs, they had a note for the general public, if you can get your dog to vouch for you, we'll accept you as a guest. It's a bad day when you have to get the dog to vouch for you.

We are God's people, and we ought to be different. I am much concerned today about what we might call trendism. It's very fashionable even in evangelical Christianity.

We are doing things that are not bad now. In their incipency they are not evil. But we fail to ask, let's see, where is this going, and where will I go if I go with it? You have to take that into consideration.

You have to take the context into consideration. That meat that was offered to Iblees was as good as any other meat, but Paul said, I won't touch it. Then he had good reason.

We've got too many borderline fundamentalists today. Some of them know all the notes in the Scofield Bible, but they are bordering on what we used to call worldliness. Nobody ever preaches on that anymore, of course.

I'm well aware of that. We call it secularism now. That's the new word.

Nobody knows what that means, so that lets the preacher off the hook. But Watchman Nee's book on Love, Not the World, which ought to be standard reading for a lot of us today, one of the greatest preachers of all time said this, and today this is out. Many would unite church and stage, cards and prayer, dancing and sacraments, if we are powerless to stem this torrent, we can at least warn men of its existence and entreat them to stay out of it, so said Spurgeon.

But that reproach is now smilingly dismissed as unwise. And it was another giant who said, the notion having grown that we must entertain men in order to win them to Christ, every invention for worldly pleasing which human ingenuity can devise, has been brought forward till the churches have been turned into playhouses by so what would he say now, and there is hardly a carnal amusement from billiards to dancing which does not find a nesting place in Christian sanctuaries, is it thin Phariseism or pessimism to sound the note of alarm, or to predict that at the present fearful rate of progress, the close of this decade may see the church as completely assimilated to secularism in the 19th century, as the 4th century church was assimilated to paganism. So said A.J. Gordon, and he knew what time it was.

Nothing is more repulsive to the Lord than religious play-acting, and the Pharisees were experts, and the most severe chapter in all the New Testament is that 23rd of Matthew, and he bore down upon them with severest condemnation. And there is no sadder silent judgment day than a phony preacher. I get frightened to this day when I read Matthew 7, 22, 23, many will show up in that day, help us, at the judgment, and say, we prophesy, we cast out demons, we have done wonderful works.

I say, I never knew you. And what does he call them? You'd think that if a fellow were good enough to prophesy, cast out demons and do wonderful works, he ought to be in pretty good shape. Ye that work iniquity, my soul, if a man can be that good and that good a preacher and yet call down this word from my Lord, pays to take stock.

This same Paul said to this same Timothy, take heed for the doctrine. We've come to a time when some people say, it doesn't matter much what you believe, as long as everybody is a good human. And then Philippians tells us that we read there about a sound message with an unsound motive, and in Galatians

you read about an unsound message with some other motive, and Gracia Machen said, Paul said very plainly there, I'd prefer a sound message, even though the motive may be a little shaky, to an unsound message, whatever the motive.

Of course, you need both. Look out about the doctrine, look out about the dynamics, stir up the gift of God that's within you. I'm afraid that extremism today regarding the Holy Spirit has driven some people to where they don't know enough about what they ought to know about the Holy Spirit.

We're so scared we'll get out on a limb, we don't even get up the tree, and after all, we ought to be spirit-filled. Paul wrote to this same timid Timothy and said, look out for that spirit of fear, watch it, and let Timothy be among you without fear. John the Baptist was a burning and a shining light.

Thank God he had heat and light both. I don't know which is worse, hot-headed ignorance or cold-hearted intelligence. I know one thing, I'd rather cool off a phonetic than try to warm up a corpse.

Then there is discipline in dear hardness, doctrine, dynamics and discipline. There is no discipline today, none in the home, generally speaking, school or church. When you have all three, you'll be in pretty good shape, because you need the doctrine that you may believe and the dynamic that you may burn and the discipline that you may behave.

That's the standard and the flags are way ahead of the regiment these days. We've paid a high price in letting the world of flesh and the devil reduce us to mediocrity. The preacher holds a special place in the economy of God.

The glamour set and the happiness boys will soon lose their charm. As McShane said, men return again and again to the few who have mastered the spiritual secret whose life has been hid with Christ in God. These are of the old-time religion, hung to the nails of the cross.

Hid with Christ in God, he put it. That's a wonderful place to be, because was it the mother of Augustine who, when they started on the trip, said, Mother, you may not get back home. She said it, my life is hid in God, I cannot die away from home.

So don't let the times reduce you to the general average. You know what the average is, it's the best of the worst and the worst of the best. There's nothing average about being a Christian or a preacher.

And if a preacher left the ministry for the biggest job on the face of the earth, even the Presidency of the United States, he'd be stepping down. It's very unpopular to be a different preacher today. Paul was that kind.

But Demas couldn't make it, because he lived this present world, and it may throw some light on it to know that his name means popular. Some time ago I was in Camp Carson in the mountains of East Tennessee with a preacher's conference. Oh, what a spot! Every morning I climbed one of them before breakfast and got up early.

The first time I tried it, it's a hard pull, and something said, You'd better call a halt and settle for half-way. But something else said, Keep climbing. My legs were wobbling, my heart was thumping, and something inside said, Who do you think you are, a teenager? You've forgotten you were born in 1901? But I made it.

When I reached the summit and looked out over that breathtaking panorama, I said, Well, the difference is worth the distance. Let me say to you, preacher, you, Christie, and anybody here, keep climbing. Some folks will only view you with contempt.

And the critics will say, Get off your high horse and join the club. Tell them, I can't do it, boys. Faith has coaxed the joyful sound and the song of saints on higher ground.

I want to scale at utmost height and catch a gleam of glory bright, anything else is out of the question. Elisha was on his way to see Elijah go to heaven in a whirlwind. That doesn't happen any day in the week.

And the students at Bethel Theological Seminary and Jericho Theological Seminary were all along the way, saying, Do you know that your Master is going up there? Yes. He said, Be quiet. Once in a while there comes along in this world some Elisha who has made up his mind to see the horses and the chariots and come back with the Prophet's mantle.

Keep climbing. The high soul walks the high road, and the low soul walks the low and in between. On the misty flats the rest drift to and fro.

If you are going to be a different preacher, and you students who go out to serve God, if you are going to be a different whatever you become, it doesn't mean getting up earlier of the morning, maybe, like old William Law, who said, Who am I to lie folded up in a bed late of the morning when the farmers have already gone about their work and I'm so far behind with my sanctification? Now, we could get in an argument on sanctification, maybe, here, if we all turned loose. But one thing I think we all agreed on, we're all far behind with our sanctification. It may mean turning off that late TV show.

It may mean skipping some little church meetings of the sons and daughters of I Will Arise. These little meetings that don't have anything to do with redemption anyhow. And you may have to deny yourself Sunday afternoon football.

You might live through it. I think of Jim Elliot, butchered in Ecuador, who wrote like a mystic. He said, I went to a friend's house last night to watch television.

And God spoke to me when I came back with this verse, Keep thou mine eyes from beholding vanity. Now, there's good stuff on TV, of course. You know what I mean.

Twenty centuries ago there was a different kind of preacher by the name of Paul. And when he came to the end of the road, he did not write his memoirs in a villa on the Riviera. He sat in an old Roman jail waiting to have his head chopped off.

The only stocks and bonds he had were stocks for his feet and bonds around his ribs. He said, Bring me my old overcoat and parchments. I guess his arthritis was bothering him in that damp dungeon.

But he said, I've been faithful to the faith, I've been faithful to the fight, and I've been faithful to the finish. And there's laid up for me a crown. It's been a hard pull, Lord, but the difference is worth the distance.

And as the days come and go and you face decisions about things and about the times and about the truth, look at that motto and say to yourself, Come what may, whatever others may do, the world passeth away and the less thereof, but as for you, do the will of God and abide forever.

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