

God Bless the Small - Part 2

by Vance Havner

The sermon emphasizes the importance of repentance and revival among Christians and in the churches, and calls for a return to the New Testament standard of spiritual growth and personal holiness.

Duration: 23:52

Scripture: Matthew 3:2, Matthew 4:17, Mark 6:12, Acts 2:21, Acts 2:38, Revelation 2:5, Revelation 3:19

Topics: "Faith"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of maintaining a sense of expectancy and belief in God's ability to bring about revival. He acknowledges that not everyone may agree with his propositions, but he believes that every sermon has multiple layers of interpretation. The preacher highlights the need for repentance, both individually and within the church, as he believes that many church members show no evidence of being born again. He criticizes the idea of revival being solely focused on increasing church membership, stating that the true challenge lies in genuine repentance among Christians.

Transcript

I don't need to tell you that some of the greatest and most blessed things that have happened in church history have happened in groups no larger than this. Thank God for the great gatherings to hear the gospel, but there are some dear people that almost have the idea that God doesn't come down anymore unless you have at least five thousand people there. Well, that would have left John Wesley's conversion and Charles Spurgeon's conversion and a great many wonderful things out.

God loves to visit a small group, too. Some preachers are too big for a small situation. I've always said that the preacher's too big for a little place, too little for a big place.

You've got too many that are like eagles on hummingbird nests. They're too big for where they are. They always want to get to some place in keeping with their monstrous ability, and they never get to it.

I've tried to do my best, regardless of the size of the crowd, because you never know when the big night is going to come. You don't know when the fire is going to fall, and I like to start for any service big or little thinking this may be the night, and if we ever lose that sense of expectancy, we might as well quit it. Faith isn't believing that God can.

It's believing God will. That's another proposition altogether. Now, I'm not sure you'll agree with me in some of my propositions in the next few minutes, but that's secondary anyway.

Somebody has said that every sermon is really three sermons. The sermon the preacher meant to preach, the sermon that he actually preached, and the sermon that people thought he preached. So there may be some variance here, but I think generally you will see the drift of what I'm aiming at.

When John the Baptist went out preaching, his message was repent, Matthew 3.2. When our Lord went out preaching, his message was repent, Matthew 4.17. When our Lord sent his disciples to preach, he told them to preach repentance, Mark 6.12. Peter, after Pentecost, preached repentance, Acts 2.38. Paul in Athens, preached repentance, Acts 20.21, and to five out of seven of the churches of Proconsul Asia. Our Lord said, repent. I've said all over this country that the last thing the Lord said to the church was not the great commission.

The last thing the Lord said to the church was repent. That's about the last thing the average church will ever do. Have you noticed that he did not say to the church of Ephesus what you need is a bigger evangelistic program? He said you need to repent and get back to your first love, and you'll be evangelistic.

He didn't say to Pergamum and Thyatira what you need is to step up your missionary activities. He said you need to repent and do something about Balaam and Jezebel. He didn't say to Thyrgus what you need more tithers.

He said you need to repent. He didn't say to Laodicea what you need is more witnessing laymen. He said you need to get over your loop horns and come to a ball.

Be zealous, that's what that means, and repent. I was in a meeting some time ago with the pastor who got his doctor's degree with a thesis on Sam Jones, the famous southern Methodist evangelist of a couple of generations ago. Sam had some very colorful ways of doing things and saying things.

One time he started meeting, he never preached to the sinners for a week or so, and the preachers got worried and said, Sam, we told you here to preach to the sinners, and you're preaching to us Christians. How come? Sam said, I never scald hogs till I get the leather hot. I have a sneaking suspicion today that we are trying to do just what he did here in that regard.

Have you ever noticed, beloved, the alternatives to repentance in our Lord's five codes, the five churches of repentance? Repent, or I will remove, I will fight, I will kill, I will come as a thief, I will spew you out of my mouth. Well, that doesn't sound like Jesus, but it is Jesus, and these are the consequences that befall unrepentant churches and preachers and preachers. I've been preaching for 55 years now, and for 30 years I've been on the road from church to church, and I'm a local church man.

The local church is the thermometer of whatever is going on for God in this world. Other things come and go, extracurricular movements, big evangelistic drives come and go, and thank God for all of them, but it's the old local church, in and out, up and down, through all sorts of seasons. It's the local church that is the thermometer of what God's doing, and I've worked with him through the years, and I've picked up Sunday morning bulletins below announcing the hopeful revival, calling on the people to visit and invite and sing and pray, and that's good, but I've looked in vain time and time again for what is so obvious that only a blind spot in our eye can account for its omission.

I found almost nothing in any church folder during a revival week about what we need in this church to repent and to get right with God and man. I hear a lot about visiting and reigning in the lost, and so on. Let me say during these days this will not be a Bible study.

I'm not a Bible teacher. This will not be an evangelistic message. I am not an evangelist.

I am sold and have been all these years on the proposition that the supreme challenge before us today has to do not even with missions or evangelists, but with repentance and revival among Christians and in the churches. We'll do everything else. Let's face it, the average so-called revival is just a drive for church members.

We already have too many of the kind. Most of them are, and that's what the pitch is. That's what the thrust is for more of the same kind.

So, I don't know what your denominational statistics are, but I know that with my crowd down south, two million Baptists can't be located. Two million more don't belong in the church in the town where they live, and I don't know how many more are living. At such a low standard, you'd have to backslide to be in fellowship.

And I wonder sometimes, where is the prophet among all the priests today who will call the people to repentance? F. B. Meyer said after one of his trips to America, when numerical increase is down and when the life of God in the church has been diminishing, instead of going back to God through his word and prayer, though we call him revivalistic preachers and use every method of the newspapers and advertising in every way to give us a revival, the reaction from which has been disastrous. We assume in the average so-called evangelistic meeting that the present membership of the church is in pretty good shape, and we wouldn't dare touch sin in the church with a 40-foot pole. I believe that the status quo needs to be unquoted today in the average situation.

Mordecai Hamm said, until we get some of God's people right, we can't hope to get sinners regenerated. And Sam Jones again said, until the church members of this city make restitution, confess slander, forgive one another, forsaking worldliness, social drinking, gambling, and card players, and other sins, they're not ready to lead sinners to Christ. Let us clean up ourselves, and sinners will be converted.

Now, that kind of preaching is passé. It's so out of style that you scarcely recognize it, but then revivals are out of style, too. Mr. Moody went to England twice in his evangelistic endeavors.

The first time he preached the grace of God, and there is no greater subject, but the second time he preached dependence because his son Paul said, he had come to know that unless there was a genuine turning away from known sins in life and thought, there would be little permanency of change. B. H. Carroll, a great southern preacher, said, I give it as my deliberate opinion that the Christian profession of today owes its lack of vital godliness, its absence from prayer meeting, its miserable semblance of missionary life very largely to the fact that old-fashioned repentance is so little preached you can't put a big house on a little foundation. Now, this is a thankless job.

I know what I'm talking about. People like to go to great crowds, great meetings, and get lost in the multitude, but you stand in a local church, as I've done Sunday after Sunday, and week after week in local churches where everybody knows everybody, and call on deacons, and choir singers, and Sunday school teachers to get right with God. You'd better remember when you do that what Joseph Parker said, the man

whose sermon is repentance sets himself against the age and will be battered mercilessly by the age whose moral tone he challenges.

There's only one end for such a man, he said, off with his head. You'd better not preach repentance until you've pledged your head to heaven. Well said, isn't it? I believe the church must first repent because the majority of our members today show no evidence of ever having been born again.

If you're what you've always been, you're not a Christian. I think people need to be reminded of that. Now, of course, some have had very quiet conversions, some have come to the Lord as children, and you don't have to be able to relate a dramatic experience like some ex-bartender might relate when you got saved, but there has to be somewhere a time when something happened that made a complete change.

I could have led some people to the Lord if they hadn't joined a church. They got in a church, and then they said, you don't mean me. You know, when I started out, there were plenty of people in the congregation who were too honest to join a church because they were sinners, and they knew they wouldn't join.

Now, everybody joins. It's a status symbol. It's good on your victory when you're dead, and everybody wants to get in, and they said, you don't mean me.

I'm one of it. I'm with the end trial. I'm already in.

Then, of course, we have this foolish idea today, and I hear it so much among the major denominations especially. All we need to do is just throw out our chests and square our shoulders and take a deep breath and take a new start. Everything's going to be perfectly lovely.

Well, Joshua could have said that after they defeated Ahab. He would have said we didn't do so well this time, but all we need to do is regroup our forces and tackle it again. They'd have been licked again because there was sin in the camp.

Joshua put on quite a prayer meeting, lay on his face before God. That's a pretty good prostitute. A lot of folks ought to be in it, but God said, get up.

No time for a prayer meeting. Israel has sinned. You have to throw it out.

The man who's at the bottom of all this will make it in, and something will happen. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth and pointed out sin. Campbell Morgan says the first half of 1 Corinthians deals with the carnality, and the second half with the spirituality.

Paul could have said, by now I know we've got one man living with the wrong woman, and disorders at the Lord's table, and Christians going below, and so on, but we've got a lot of people here, and so I'm going to accentuate the positive. I don't want to make anybody unhappy. He didn't do that.

He made quite a lot of people unhappy. He didn't skip it. You can't skip it.

We are going to skip it today, and we can't. I hear it said all you have to do is preach love. Well, if all you have to do is preach love, why did Paul wait till the 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians before he got around to love? Why didn't he start out with it in the very first chapter? There are those who say, well, things could be worse.

Well, maybe they could, but I belong to the school that says things could be better, and they ought to be better, and we have no right to say it's always been like that. That's one of the old, worn-out alibis. Well, suppose it has always been like that.

That doesn't justify it, and then the other things are just as bad. Well, that doesn't make whatever you're talking about any better, so we use the lamentable logic all along the line instead of facing the thing. I heard of some small boys who started out to play baseball, and they got over to the field and discovered that they didn't have the baseball with them.

There were some moments of frustration, and one of them said, oh, let's forget the ball and get on with the game. Well, there are a lot of churches today trying to get on with the game when they don't have the ball. The church can do many things after she repents, but she can't do anything till she repents.

I hear it said, let's forget our faults and our failings and our theological differences in our world, and let's close ranks and march ahead. But we're in the same kind of spiritual warfare today that they're in militarily over in Vietnam. There was a time in old-fashioned warfare when the enemy was lined up out there, and you knew who to shoot at.

But the direct tone of above and below and around and everywhere knew in which direction to shoot. There was a time when spiritual issues were pretty clearly defined. Black was black, and white was white, and now it's a smudge of indefinite gray, and you don't know who's where, and you don't know what to do.

It's the same sort of situation. The devil is not fighting churches today. He's joining churches.

He can do more harm as a church member than he ever did on the outside. I don't believe in this business of saying, well, let's quit talking about what's wrong with the church. I don't believe in stopping there, of course, but certainly we must deal with it.

I don't believe in saying, let's call a halt and get to work. I read this the other day in an evangelical magazine. Suppose our linen isn't spotless, the robes of Christ are dazzlingly white.

Well, that sounds very hot, but it's very misleading. I read in Sardis that there were a few who had not defiled their garments. We are under obligation to keep our garments clean and unspotted from the world.

I know that Christ is our righteousness upon us, but he ought to be in us, too. I don't believe in a righteousness on you that's not in you. I read of a testimony meeting some time ago where a dear brother got up and said, well, it's like an old barn out here in the country in the wintertime, all covered over with the snow, and that's for them old sinful hearts all covered over with the righteousness of Christ.

An old lady got up and said, brother, if you ever thaw out, you will be in a terrible fit. I don't believe in a righteousness on you that doesn't fit on the inside of you. I believe that our position up there, and our condition down here, and our standing up there, and our state down here ought to correspond.

And while we cannot live faultless lives, we are exerted to be blameless and can be in this present world. Certainly I believe in putting on the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our righteousness, but I believe in what comes next.

Make not provision for the flesh. Certainly I believe in preaching the grace of God, but I don't forget that it is the grace of God that teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously

and godly in this present world, looking for the Lord to come back. Certainly I believe in preaching the promises of God, but I remember a verse that says, Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Certainly I don't believe in judging folks. The Lord knoweth them that are His. I'm glad He does, otherwise some of them would be pretty hard to identify.

But the next line says, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from the nickel. One of the best writers that we've had in this generation, now with the Lord, A. W. Tozer of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. I've got hold of everything that I can find that Tozer wrote.

I was with him a week in his Chicago church. I thought a lot of that man. He bragged.

He spent a lot of time alone. He didn't get caught in the rat race, the ministerial rat race. I was at Midwest Kizzik in Moody Church, I remember, one fall, and the rest of us preachers, Paul Rees and Redpath and Duncan from England and others, we gathered every night in a hotel where we were staying, had refreshments and fellowship.

Tozer didn't come. He went home. He didn't meet with us any time.

Well, you might criticize that, but it couldn't help but sneakily admire him for daring to be himself and blazing his own trail, and he had a habit of saying some things that would knock you down the first time you read them, but he always put them that way to get you to think. And he said this, the popular notion that the first obligation of the church is to spread the gospel to the uttermost part of the earth is false. Her first obligation is to be spiritually worthy to spread.

Our Lord said, Go ye, but he first said, Carry ye. Many said evangelical Christianity is now tragically below the New Testament standard. Wellness is accepted as part of our way of life.

Our religious mood is social instead of spiritual. We've lost the art of worship. We're not producing saints.

Our models are successful businessmen, celebrated athletes, and theatrical personalities. We carry on our religious activities after the methods of the modern advertiser. Our homes have been turned into theaters, our literature is shallow, and our hymn of orders on sacrilegiousness scarcely anybody appears to care.

I agree completely with that position, but you're not supposed to say things like that today. It's not nice. You're supposed to get with it.

The only thing I know about this is that I absolutely refuse to be with it. There's still enough preachers and people over this country that I'm busy and have ever been, and I figure that there must be, and I hope there are enough grassroots Christians as well as Americans left in this land today that, given the proper leadership in the direction of God, we might yet see something happen, and might yet see a spiritual earthquake. My Bible says in Psalm 119, verse 126, It is time for thee, Lord, to work, and in Hosea 10, verse 12, sow to yourselves in righteousness wreath and mercy.

Break up your folly ground. It is time to seek the Lord, till he come and reign righteousness upon you. It is time for thee, Lord, to work.

It is time to seek the Lord. Divine sovereignty in one, and human responsibility in the other. God's business in one, and our business in the other.

Break up your folly ground. I love these old homely phrases out of the Bible. You know what folly ground is.

It's ground that is lain idle and uncultivated, and it's covered with weeds and briars and thistles, and it is unproductive because it's undisturbed. Churches that don't get disturbed once in a while, and preachers that don't get disturbed. You will understand I'm preaching to myself as well as to you when I say tonight that we get so in the habit of telling everybody else what they ought to do.

Sometimes the doctor needs to take his own medicine. I like that other term in the Bible, morad, that's settled on his leaves and has not been emptied from vessel to vessel. Settled on his leaves refers to the grapes, the herbs of the grapes in the bottom of a wine vat, or milk that has set till it turns, or vinegar with a skim over it.

I've been in churches that had a skim over it, and they needed to be churned up and emptied from vessel to vessel, and preachers can get like that, and preachers can get like that, and we need to be churned up and we resent it of course. Sometimes your medicine bottle says shake well before using. That's what God has to do with a lot of these people.

He has to shake them well before they're usable. It's like the sugar in the bottom of the lemonade glass. It's there, but you don't taste it till it's stale.

I know some dear people. I think they've got their legs in. I think they'll go to heaven when they die, but my soul, how they need to stir it.

The sugar's all at the bottom, and they need to be aroused and thoroughly aroused. And I don't mean with these silly, ridiculous ways of trying to stir up the saints. If you've ever heard that Methodist, Clovis Chapel, preach, he's a dry wit, but a wit if ever there was one.

He said, I went to a church where the meeting started off kind of dull, and the young preacher thought he ought to lie, have enough pain. He said, here's your help with the old trick. I want five on this side, everyone on this side shake hands with five people, everyone on this side shake hands with five people, and so on.

And so Clovis said, you might as well try to boil water over the picture of a girl lying there. You know, beloved, if we ever do have a revival, I don't know whether we're going to have one or not. I don't say we can't, because if five people can be revived, 50 can be revived, 500 can be revived, where are you going to draw the line? I don't know.

I tell you one thing, if we ever have a sure enough visitation, we're going to hang our heads in shame for the silly ways we've tried to produce a moving of God in the energy of the flesh. The way we've called on the world of flesh and the devil to help us out is going to make us red in the face if a sure enough visitation from God ever comes. When I get low and stiff, I dig out a few old ragged books I've got about the Welsh revival.

I've been with Stephen Orr a pretty good deal lately, and meetings down in the south, and our evangelistic conferences, and he tells me that Edwin Orr is doing up a great big book proving and showing that

tremendous after-effects of that Welsh revival are still good. Even if it wasn't a local revival, the effects of it went around the world. I've worked with a few.

I remember one dear brother in Aurora, Illinois, I believe. The Welshman is dead and gone now, but everyone that I worked with who came out of that revival had the smell of the fire on him yet. Stephen Orr had the chance of talking to Edwin Roberts, spearheading of blood for that revival.

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