

Hearing and Doing God's Word - Part 1

by Vance Havner

The sermon emphasizes the importance of knowing and doing God's Word, and the need for a revival of obedience and action in our lives.

Duration: 29:38

Scripture: Ezekiel 33:33, Matthew 6:33, John 13:17, James 1:22

Topics: "Word Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the issue of spectatorship in American culture, particularly in the context of church services. He criticizes the mindset of going to church without any intention of actively engaging with the sermon. The preacher emphasizes the importance of making a commitment and taking action based on the word of God. He also highlights the danger of using drama and unworthy means to convey the gospel message. The sermon references biblical passages, such as the story of Naaman and the words of God to the prophet Ezekiel, to illustrate the need for genuine obedience and understanding of God's will.

Transcript

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They also provide stimulating material for group interaction. Permission to broadcast or to copy this tape in any form must be secured in writing from CBC Media Ministries. I did not discover until a short time ago in reading again through the book of Ezekiel how many, many, many times from start to finish in that book, one runs across the phrase that they may know that I am the Lord.

That seems to have been the whole purpose of the whole book. I want these people to be God conscious. You'll be amazed, take your pencil and underline in almost every chapter, you'll find at least one, and they shall know that I am the Lord, or that they shall know that I am the Lord.

In this 33rd chapter, God is speaking to the Prophet, and he's describing the average service today, and it's so familiar to the experience of some of us even today, that I feel like saying before I get through it, Ezekiel, I know what you mean. It's not complementary to our religious services any more than Isaiah 1 is.

It almost makes fun of them in Isaiah and in Amos.

To what purpose is all this? Come to Bethel and transgress, and Gilgal multiply transgression, and in here also thou son of man. The children of thy people still are talking against thee, or about thee, by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord. Let's all go to the meeting tonight.

And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them. For with their mouth they show much love, but their heart, that's always where the trouble is, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument, for they hear thy words, but they do them not.

And when this cometh to pass, lo, it will come, there will be one compensation for it all. They may not do anything you're talking about. Then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them.

And my ambition during these years past in this ministry, and I'm not an evangelist, and I'm not a Bible teacher, and I'm not a pastor, I don't use the word prophet because that means to most people somebody predicting the end of the world all the time, and somebody in a long robe with a walking stick and wearing sandals, and a foreteller instead of a foreteller, as the old definition puts it so well. But my ambition has been so to preach. I'm not responsible for what people do about it, but I am responsible for one thing, to preach so that after I've gone, they'll say a prophet was among us, that by the grace of God, we can do.

Now, I want you to notice here how very simple all this is. Notice the verbs in here. They come, they sit, they listen.

They say, as a pleasant voice can play well on an instrument, they compliment the preacher. I enjoyed the sermon, which is about the last thing you hope they'll say sometimes. But they won't do anything about it.

Now, alongside that portion in the Old Testament, I'd like to put up a similar column parallel in the New Testament in the more familiar James 1, 22. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass.

For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgeteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, continueth, mind you, therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word, this man shall be blessed in his deed. Now, between those two parallel columns of truth, one from the Old Testament and one from the New, I would like for you to put as a capstone over both of them, John 13, 17, where our Lord said, If ye know these things, happy are ye, if ye do them.

The doors to true happiness are on two swinging doors, both marked if. If ye know these things, you can't get in by that door if you don't use the other one too. And if you do them.

You never needed a dictionary when you went to hear Jesus. As it stands in our versions today, most everything you said was, the simplest were the words often monosyllables. I don't know of any simpler way to say this.

If ye know these things, happy are ye, if ye do them. If ye know these things, that's the intellect. Happy are ye, that's the emotions.

If ye do them, that's the will, and that's all of human personality. If ye know these things, that's the head. Happy are ye, that's the heart.

If ye do them, that's the hand, and that's the whole picture. That's all of it. Now, it doesn't just say, If ye know these things, happy are ye, because otherwise we'd have a lot of folks that are happy that are not happy.

We've got an amazing amount of Bible knowledge today. We've never had so many much taught, if not well taught congregations as today, what with radio and TV and schools and conferences and churches. But most of the ones that I see are not happy.

Jesus didn't say, If ye know these things, happy are ye. And as a matter of fact, he didn't come down here to make us happy primarily, but to make us holy. And people will come out to hear how to be happy, but you start talking about how to be holy.

And they say, No, that's not what I wanted. Everybody is interested in feeling better and all that sort of thing. But here, the happiness is not a slushy, sentimental happiness that ought to be spelled H-A-P-P-E-N in ESS, because it depends on what happens.

But that's not this. Now, my Lord indeed said, These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. But he was also a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

It's a strange joy. It comes from a man of sorrows. And it's a deep and abiding joy.

You don't have to wear a glorified grin all the time to have it. But it's a radiant, victorious, triumphant joy. The early Christians were in trouble most of the time and in jail a lot of the time.

But out of the jail they said, Rejoice in the Lord always. And for fear we hadn't got it the first time. And again I say, Rejoice.

Now, I don't find much of that today. I've been in some fundamental churches, Orthodox, Evangelistic, Premillennial, and everything else. Knew all the footnotes in the Schofield Bible.

And yet, icicles hanging all over the auditorium. They hadn't had a revival in 25 years, some of them. A revival is a resurgence of Christian joy.

Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation. Philip went down to Samaria. And I've always heard that he had a great revival.

He didn't have any such thing. They were all dead down there in trespasses and sins. They had an Evangelistic meeting.

And folks got saved. And I read that there was great joy then in that city. And I read that after the resurrection, then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.

It doesn't say when Peter looked at John and Philip looked at Bartholomew. If you want to get miserable, start looking around at church members. That will ruin you.

Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. So yeah, the emphasis is on a vision of Him that makes us God conscious. And the whole thing, you notice, is wrapped around something that's out of style today.

And that's praying over obedience. I don't know when I've ever heard a sermon on obedience. Nobody wants to hear about that.

It's just like that word loss. It's been a long time since I've ever heard a dad or a mother say, Pray for my lost boy or daughter. They used to come to the mourners' bench in New York and pray for their lost children.

Now they'll say, Well, John is a good boy, but still was the rich young ruler, but he was not God's boy. And I don't hear folks get around to the real trouble. And yet these are the people Jesus came to seek and to save.

Lost folks. Back in 1912, we had the great disaster of the sinking of the Titanic. I was only 11 years of age, but I remember the terrific impression it made then.

And you know, that was one of the strangest things that's ever happened in seafaring. We've never gotten over it because they're preparing now an expedition of oceanographers and divers to try to locate it. And if possible, reach it.

And if it's barely possible within the realm of what we can do, perchance, some strange way, raise it sometime. Well, who wants 12,000 feet of water? And yet preserve that. Nobody knows what you'll find down there.

It may be a very remarkable discovery. Some millionaire's back of it. He says there are jewels in there worth retrieving after all this time.

And I heard a great preacher some time ago by TV from Birmingham preach a great sermon on the Titanic. And Mordecai Ham used to have a sermon on the sinking of the Titanic, and he said God was trying to teach us an object lesson that we didn't get, and I believe that. He said it was guaranteed not to sink, unsinkable.

And the only thing it ever did was sink on the very first trip over. And what it took to send it down was just a plain, common hunk of ice out there in the water, as if God said, you're not as smart as you thought you were. We thought we had the problem licked.

And 1,500 people and over went to their deaths in all that icy water. And when it was all over in the steamship offices back in this country, they had two lists, loss and save. And when life is over and the last ship rose in, it won't matter whether you were with the millionaires on the top deck or with the common folks down in the steerage.

It won't matter whether you drove a Cadillac or pushed an apple cart through town. The only thing that matters is which list are you on. And we're not hearing much about that loss list anymore, and it bothers me a great deal.

And we're not hearing much about obedience. The greatest revivalist of all time, I think, was Finney. He was a lawyer, and God converted the lawyer and sent him out pleading for a verdict, and he always did.

The true lawyer that he was, he wanted a verdict. And he said, whereas mind and conscience may assent to the truth, when revival comes, obedience to the truth is the one thing that matters. We don't go after obedience today.

We go after a big crowd and a lot of people join in the church and all the rest of it. But obedience to the truth is what God is looking for. And Finney gave the best definition of a revival I've ever heard about, and there's nothing Hollywood about it at all.

A revival is nothing less than a new beginning of obedience to God. Now, that's plain as an old shoe, isn't it? But that's the truth. And when people get right with God, that's revival.

There may be a lot of hooping and hollering. There may not. There'll be results.

Yes, indeed. But you don't find the word obeyed. We threw it out of the wedding ceremony.

Ezekiel ministered in an evil time. Folks came and bragged on the preacher, and they still do that. But when you get over to James, he warns of the same evil.

And I've never heard anybody recite that verse that I read from James a while ago from memory and recite all of it. I have yet to encounter the first person who will say, now, the Bible says, No, that's not where the period is. It ends deceiving your own selves.

Do you know it's a dangerous thing to go to meeting? It's a serious thing to go to church. And I wonder what we're ever going to do to get people to realize that when you come in and sit down and hear the Word of God, you place yourself under a great privilege, but you put yourself under a terrific obligation. And that is to do it.

There's privilege, there is responsibility, and then there's penalty, self-deception, if you don't do it. There's one thing worse than not going to church, and that is going to church and not doing anything about what you heard. Because you've brought on yourself a double blame of self-deception.

And it's quite possible that here tonight there will be people, and some of you may have been coming all week, but you are not ready to do, and you don't intend to do much about what God says. The besetting sin of the saints today is hearing without doing, and that's a grievous thing, because this same James 4.17 says, To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, doeth it not. See, there it is again in the negative.

See, to him it is sin. And the centuries have passed, but the circumstances, while they have changed, the realities are about the same. There are people today who go to the movies or watch TV and get all excited in that world of make-believe.

They're trying to escape from reality. They try to get away from it watching TV. And they try to escape, but they don't.

And some of them try to go out and maybe act out some of the things they've seen. I hope they don't, but some of them do. And we have movie drunkards who are living on excitement, TV drunkards, and they get worked up to an emotional sort of spree.

And we have them in Christian work. We have religious drunkards, Bible conference drunkards, revival meeting drunkards, who go from meeting to meeting and get all hepped up and don't do a blessed thing about it. And by and by their moral muscles become flabby, and they lose their capacity for being allowed,

and they suffer from a moral letdown and a spiritual hangover.

And they delude themselves. And never have they heard more preachers and read more books than now. Their hearts have been thrilled.

But it's like it is when you start taking a stimulant, you keep it up, and you'll have to increase the dose, and after a while nothing will affect you. And when you bought that alarm clock and put it at the head of the bed, the first morning it went off, you came up and out, because it did its duty, and you did yours. But the Word of God is an alarm clock, and God wants to arouse us.

Some of us don't do much about that. The holy stirrings of the Spirit of God through the Word of God, I'd rather play with forked lightning any time than that. The Bible is dynamite, and calls itself a hammer, a fire, and a sword.

A hammer is a very disturbing thing. I live in motels just about all the time. And I don't know why it is that I get the room next to the one they're remodeling.

And I don't know how that fellow knows where my head is in the next room. You know what? Imagine what a lovely nap I have in the afternoon. It's disturbing.

And then a sword. I wrote a book, *Not Peace, But A Sword*. I never have heard much about it, because I think it was a little too rich for some folks' blood.

They want the peace, but they don't want the sword. And Jesus said, I didn't come to send peace, I came to send the sword. Do you know that's in the book? Now, of course, you've got to understand what he meant by that, but he understood enough to make it pretty terrific.

And I find that those who did read it, Lutheran pastor Lutheran said, I'm afraid you ought to have that book. Got under conviction about it. It was in the form of a story, more or less.

It got the inspiration from the old book, *In His Steps*. A young pastor and a little handful of his members decided to start out and live as they really believed Jesus would live and see what happened. Well, plenty happened.

Believe me. I got him in more trouble in 10 chapters than I could get him out of 150. Something's going to happen.

You start out living for Jesus Christ and there it is. But today, we don't want to be aroused. The fire is disturbing.

I was in a Sheraton hotel in Charlotte some time ago when I was with Ralph Rhodes down there. And about the middle of the night, the fire alarm went off. And you know what a disturbance that can be in the middle of the night.

And everybody woke up in this weird, this awful racket. Get down there in a hurry. And when he goes off, you don't stand up there and say, Now, which suit shall I wear down to the fire? I put on my raincoat over my pajamas and went down 11 flights.

The elevators were out 11 flights and when I got down there, the rest of that crowd didn't look any better than I did, either. I'm amazed at how ornery we can look when we haven't had a chance to fix up a little bit.

But we were all disturbed.

And the Word of God is a disturbing thing. We're spectators. America is smitten with spectator writers, stadiums, movies, churches.

And we go to church with no more intention of doing anything about the sermon than we intended, I hope. We do nothing about what we saw on the TV. Not participants.

Onlookers. To be entertained. I said it in an evangelistic conference in California two years ago and didn't get many amens.

I've said it a couple of times since. The amens have been real scarce. I said America is show-crazy, sports-crazy, and sex-crazy.

Well, that's the most I've heard. Say it again. But you know how it is.

One of our writers today, Ernest Hemingway was, said we are suffering from a flood of actors who can't act and writers who can't write and singers who can't sing and they're all making a million dollars a year. That's a pretty good description of the thing. We've gone in for drama and when the church goes in for drama, look out.

Because they're acting the truth as though it were fiction. And that's always dangerous. And when you're on fire for God, you don't need to act it.

That's real when you mean it. But drama is dangerous. And there are those who say, well, any means you use today to get the gospel out, the end justifies the means.

It doesn't do any such thing. The end, the means determines the end. If you're using an unworthy means, you've already spoiled the objective before you've ever gotten to it.

The music of today, I wonder how some people can turn on that TV first thing in the morning, leave it on all day and half of the night, considering the kind of music it is. The other day at the motel where they had the loudspeaker on all day all over the place. You couldn't get away from it.

And that music. I've heard better notes from a tomcat with his tail caught in the door than any such a time. When are we going to have a revival getting back to effect? In the first place, the gospel is never meant for entertainment, which a lot of folks will argue against with very low signature.

But it's serious business to face the truth of the word of God. Now, some of you will go out here tonight comparing one preacher with another. But what difference does that make in the sight of God? Notice here that my Lord had a lot to say about doing.

Oh, you say that salvation is not spare deal. It's spare deal when you write. It's a finished work.

I grant you that. But listen. You are my friends if you do the things which I command you.

He that doeth the will of my Father is the same as my brother and sister and mother. Why told you me, Lord, Lord, do not the things that I say. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, but he that doeth the will of my Father in heaven.

He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me. He that heareth and doeth my will be like a wise man, buildeth his house on a rock. And one day in Luke 11, Jesus was preaching and the woman got happy and said, What a wonderful thing it must have been to be your mother.

And Jesus said, Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it. I have often quoted the Great Commission and on purpose left out two words and then asked the congregation what did I leave out and most of them didn't know I'd left anything out. And there are the two most vital words, I think, isn't it? Teaching them.

It doesn't say teaching them all things whatsoever I have commanded you and lo, I am with you and so on. Teaching them to observe. Oh, thank you, good afternoon.

You haven't learned it until you've learned to do it. And you haven't taught it unless you've taught folks to do it. A lot of Bible teaching today reminds me of swimming lessons on dry land.

You tell them what to do, what to do, but you will never learn how to swim on dry land. You've got to make a plan. You've got to make a commitment.

The dear old lady who said her rule for reading the Bible is to read the Bible until she came to a commandment and then do the commandment. That's a pretty good rule, after all. When we have real revival, what we know intellectually, we'll be obeyed volitionally and then we'll be happy emotionally.

And that's what our Lord was saying here, knowing the Word of God and doing the will of God. But, nevertheless, all of that took in obedience. And that's true throughout the Word of God.

When Naaman came to Elisha, my what a contrast that was. This general has always written you of helpers. A lot of money.

All his badges and buttons came to this country preacher, Elisha. And Elisha didn't even come out to meet him. He said, Go dip seven times in Jordan and you'll be all right.

And he said, Who does he think I am? And who does he think he is? Now, Elisha could have healed him on the spot without a whole trip to Jordan so far it lay within the possibility. But, God had set it up another way and there was some obeying to be done. And nothing would have happened if he hadn't gone and dipped in Jordan.

It wasn't the waters of Jordan that healed him, but it was an obedience that carried out the commandment of the Lord. So he went down and up and down and up, one, two, three, four, five, six. And the servants might have said, General, I believe you might as well get out.

I don't think it's going to work. And he was mad about it anyhow. That muddy creek, Jordan, we've got Abba none far from it.

In Damascus, what a silly ordinance this is after all. But he went that seven times. And he went down and up and his flesh was the flesh of a little child.

He went the path of obedience and all the way. And then in the New Testament, Jesus said to the man who was blind, and Jesus put the clay on his eyes. Now, Jesus could have healed him.

He'd have healed other people outright. Joel was in the pool of Siloam. And the poor fellow, mind you, still couldn't see.

And he searched down through town, healing his way, murder over his face. And some of his friends must have said, Well, what's he up to now? Some of them came and said, Where are you going? Well, I met Jesus. And he put clay on my eyes and said, You go to the pool of Siloam and wash it off, and I'm doing what he said.

And it worked. Old John McNeill, I'm going out in two weeks to a Bible conference in Cannon Beach, Oregon, that is now managed by his granddaughter, Heather McNeill. That's a Scottish name for you.

And what a preacher. John McNeill wasn't. This is his son who started the conference.

But John was a contemporary of Mildred. John McNeill used to preach on this and said, I, some of you, have had the murder pride and the murder pride and the murder pride. You've heard sermon and sermon and sermon and you have done nothing else.

You have not done the next thing. And now it has caked and you're blinder than you ever were. And that'll do the tank over.

A habitual Bible conference goer might well meditate on that. Have you done the next thing that the Lord said to do? You see, I have a one-sided quarter in your life. That's the other side of the coin.

Jesus, Son of God, Jesus, Son of Man. Peace and sword, as I said a while ago. Jesus, Savior, Jesus, Lord.

Separation from the world, empowerment in the world, going into the world. Always there and I...

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