

Is This That?

by Vance Havner

The sermon emphasizes the need for a doctrinal revival and repentance within the church, and warns against the dangers of liberalism and trying to produce results without the revival.

Duration: 23:15

Scripture: Isaiah 1:11-13, Isaiah 6:8, Joel 2:15-17, Joel 2:28, Amos 4:4-5, Matthew 23:23, Luke 9:62

Topics: "Revival"

Description

In this sermon, Dr. Crouch addresses the state of the church and its lack of spiritual concern for the world. He compares the average church membership to a malfunctioning electric sign, with some members missing and others wavering. He emphasizes that the program of the professing church today is not aligned with what Peter was talking about in the Bible. Dr. Crouch highlights the importance of breaking up the fallow ground and repentance before expecting a harvest and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

What does this mean? And Peter answered, this is that, which was spoken by the prophet Noah. And I want us to think about it with the sentence inverted a little, is this, that. Today the knighted world is watching a bewildered church with its confusing projects and programs and its movements and counter-movements and it's asking, what does this mean? And the big question is, is this, that.

Is the life and work of the church today what Peter and Joel are talking about? When I say church, I don't, I mean of course first of all the big institutional organizational set-up, the profession church. There is a true church within the church of all genuine Christians. God knows how many members there are in it.

It's like the faithful remnant in Malachi and the faithful here in Sardis and there is where the real scream of God's purpose is flowing. The rest of the profession church will end up in the world church under antichrist. But the question is, in the church as we think of it today, is this, that.

Is the program of the profession church today what Peter was talking about? Most of it is not. It's the feverish and feeble and frustrated and futile attempt to secure secondary results without the primary causes. When you grow a crop, you have to do four things.

You break up the ground, you sow the seed, you cultivate the crop and you gather the harvest. Now God has called different men for different functions in that connection. The business of the Bible teaches to sow

the seed of the word and the pastor cultivates it and the evangelist gathers the harvest.

But there needs to be a ground-breaker-upper, a John the Baptist first of all, to break up the ground. I'm afraid, beloved, we're trying to harvest when we haven't broken up the fallow ground. We're trying to take up item number two and three and four when we haven't put on our agenda item number one.

We're trying to produce the results of revival without the revival. We've had all kinds of revivals. We've had building revivals, but God dwells not in temples made with hands.

Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. And unless we bring them to church sanctified and meet for the Master's use, God won't even look at us, though we meet in a church as big as the Pentagon. Too many church members today are not human temples, they're human chivalry.

And if we don't have more holy temples in our congregation, our other temples of brick and mortar will just be Ichabod Memorial with the glory divine. Then we have church membership revival. We've stuffed the church rolls with the names of baptized pagans, and you can't find most of them with a church warrant, and yet we glory in the protection.

One of the unmentioned sins that we shall have to confess if God ever enters the heavens and comes down is this. We've had stewardship and tithing revivals, but if a Macedonian doesn't give God the Macedonian before he gives God the money, if he doesn't give self before substance, we're only gathering vain oblations that Isaiah preached about. We need to hear Amos at Bethel again with his irony and sarcasm.

Come to Bethel and transgress at Gilgal, Mother Clark, transgression. Bring your sacrifices every morning and your tithes after three years. And our Lord is saying to the Pharisees, you tithe but you neglect the weightier matters.

These ought you to have done and not to leave the other undone. We do need revivals of all these things, and there are others who are saying we need revivals of this and revivals of that, and they tell us now we need an ecumenical revival. We've always had an ecumenical fellowship.

I go to Bible conferences. For instance, I've gone a lot to Lenona Lake, and people of all denominations come there, and they love the Lord Jesus and love the Lord. We don't think much about it up there.

We're all one in the Lord Jesus. Any sensible Baptist recognizes anybody who knows Jesus as his brother in the Lord. We've agreed on that all through the past.

We might not be able to live theologically under the same roof as some folks, but we can be neighborly just the same. I heard of a fellow who couldn't get along with his wife, and he built her a house next to his. And the story goes that one day a friend came along and looked in the kitchen window and saw blueberry muffins and cakes and pies and said to him, Why, I didn't know you were a cook.

And he said, Oh, they came from next door. And the visitor said, Well, why don't they? Why can't you all get along? He said, Nobody could get along with that woman, but I'll tell you one thing. You couldn't ask for a better neighbor.

Now, I am saying you may not be able to live under the same roof as some folks, but why not be neighbors with all of my fellow of the Lord? This big super church is another matter, and it's not a sign of

strength. It's a sign of weakness to try to get everybody together in one great big mulligan stew in the name of theology. The early church did not grow by consolidation.

It grew by diffusion. And most of the church membership of America doesn't know what it's all about anyhow. What good would it do to get them all together? A hundred blind men can't seem to better than one blind man.

Then they tell us that we need a theological revival. I prefer to call it a doctrinal revival. Not many Christians are theologians, but every Christian ought to be able to give a scriptural reason for the hope within him.

That's doctrine. And if you mean a return to the truths that were once believed, we do need a doctrinal revival. The scriptures tell us that in the last days there will be a departure from the faith.

Some people refuse to see that today. Anybody who does see it is called a pessimist and a viewer of alarm and a witch hunter because he sees the wolves coming. Well, that's the time to see the wolves coming, and not when it gets into the flock.

We are sheep among wolves, but you have to look out for the wolves among the sheep. A man would have to be blind in both eyes and bereft of his brains not to see Satan as an angel of light drawing a church salary in many a place today for denying the truth. I'll say one thing for Bob Ingersoll.

He stayed out of the pulpit. We ought to give him credit for that. He didn't draw a church salary for preaching infidelity.

And in his day, he had a lecture on the mistakes of Moses. And one fellow said, I wouldn't cross the street to hear Ingersoll on the mistakes of Moses, but I sure would like to hear Moses on the mistakes of Ingersoll. Then we have these inclusivists today who say we have room for all grades and shades of theology in our fellowship.

Friend, that's too much room. Can two walk together if they be not agreed to the same fountain, cannot send forth both bitter water and sweet? We may differ on minor details, but liberalism is another matter. Liberalism is not a different variety of Christianity.

It's another religion altogether, root, branch, and fruit. And Paul said, if we are an angel from heaven preaching the other gospel, let him be damned. That's the saying of the great preacher.

Dr. Phillips said the early church opposed false doctrine in a manner that sounds almost unchristian to us today. Now, some of us here lived through the theological controversy of over 30 years ago when we had everything from William Jennings Bryan to Harry Emerson Foster. I remember those years.

I was upset by some myself. I was inclined to take a liberal position on some point. I can't go into all that now, but the good Lord got me out of it.

I remember telling my father that I couldn't anymore go back to the old position and a chicken could go back into its shell. But thank God the Lord unhatched me. I remember sitting in the woods up here in Catawba County reading Gresham Machen and that old Presbyterian straightened me out in that book on liberalism and Christianity.

Today we have new personalities and new terminology, but it's the same old virus under a new name. You can call rheumatism arthritis, but it keeps on hurting, just the same. You can put the poison in a new bottle, it will kill you, just the same, and all the more dangerous because it is in a new bottle with a new label on it.

You can't go by terminology. Just because you employ a certain term doesn't mean much these days. Just because you've got athlete's foot doesn't make you an athlete.

Liberalism talks tolerance, but it's always one-way tolerance. It's tolerant of everything going its way. It has kind words for apostates and nothing but scorn for old-fashioned Bible-believing Christians.

If you take a stand against it, you are not Christ-like. And there's no peaceful coexistence along this line anymore than there was with the Israelites and the Canaanites or the free world and communism. Of course, the answer is not in the bitter fundamentalism.

Some of our brethren of other fellowships that I need not name have demonstrated that. They started with the best of intentions, and then they degenerated into splits and subsplits and splinters and little groups like these matches that won't strike on any box except the box they came in. And they whip it off, and everybody who doesn't dot all his I's and cross all his T's like they do.

The answer, beloved, is not come-outism. It doesn't lie in going down the street and starting another church. You need a revival in the same old church.

That's a good place to have a revival. You don't have to pull out and leave the denomination. I've seen some good people back through the age pull out, and most of them got out on a limb and sawed the limb off.

I don't like a lot of things I see. Of course not. Southern Baptist is not perfect.

Show me a crowd that is. But nobody's ever told me what to preach. I've had perfect liberty to preach as a Southern Baptist all these years.

I've been a Southern Baptist longer than most of you have been in this world. And I've had liberty all the time. I don't believe, though, in turning the old ship over to the new years.

We were here first. One of my best friends was W.G. Riley of the First Baptist in Minneapolis. He baptized my wife.

And old Dr. Riley used to say, I'm standing where Baptists used to stand. When they get right, they'll be where I am because I'm where they used to be. Oh, how we need a doctrinal revival.

But while history repeats itself, it rarely reverses itself. And I can't think of any great church or church body that ever changed gears and returned to the old paths once it began to deny the faith. The momentum increases, and there is a point of no return.

Then they tell us we need a social revival. Revival of social involvement. Well, Christianity has always had social implications.

We're the souls of the earth. Salt doesn't do any good in a soul shaker. It has to be shaken out and rubbed into the corruption of a decaying civilization.

I didn't have to read Bonhoeffer to know that we belong out in the world, ministering there. As the Father sent me into the world, so send I you into the world. Some of the greatest advances in the betterment of society have followed great spiritual awakenings, like the Wesleyan revival.

That's one thing. But it's something else when the church becomes a party to political movements masquerading as moral issues, government-sponsored and sociologically-oriented reformations. We've got no business being amateur sociologists.

That's not our main business to begin with. And unless religious social action is the spontaneous expression of a vital and personal Christianity, it's a fake and a fraud, you can give all your goods to feed the poor, and without love you will be profited nothing. We're having a vast expenditure of time and ink and brains today over the supposed polarization between evangelism on one side and social action on the other.

Some folks say it's just two sides of the same coin. The church has majored on the vertical man-to-God relationship, and now we're catching up, they say, on the horizontal relationship. Some are more excited over Lazarus and his poverty than they are over diabetes on his way to hell.

Some are trying to put the robe on the prodigal while he's still feeding hogs, trying to put a ring on his finger while he's still in the pigsty, killing the fatted calf for a generation feeding on her, building bigger and better hog pens out in the far country. They've forgotten that the prodigal son was rehabilitated after he went home, and there isn't any record that he said, I will arise and apply for government aid. Why, my old-fashioned father up in Catawba County wouldn't have known a sociologist if he'd met one coming down the middle of the road, but he was for better roads and better schools and cleaner politics just because he was a Christian, and his influence moved out in all directions.

Neither evangelism or social action will be any better than the people back of him. You had a great Negro preacher here last year who said a sick church can't help a sick world, and how true that is. We're trying to propagate a low-grade anemic Christianity, and we've confused normal Christians with average Christians.

The average Christian today is a subnormal Christian. A normal Christian would be an oddball in the eyes of the average church member. And until the church repents, and until we have a better grade of Christians, you're going to have one group of evangelism, encompassing sea and land to make proselytes when we already have too many of the kind most of them are, and the other propagating a truncated social reform under religious auspices.

We are polarized, you say, between these two, and which comes first? Well, neither one of them comes first. This is not a chicken-and-egg question. I'll tell you what comes first.

You have it in the Talley Declaration. Three things mentioned there. First, the deepening of the spiritual life within the church's homes and individual Christians.

And we were supposed to have taken care of that last year in preparation. But I noticed that Dr. Clout said some time ago, and I read it out of a biblical recorder, but have we used 1968 to get ready? Have you searched your heart for self-centeredness? Real, real dishonesty should be living unto a lack of spiritual concern for our world. Are you saying it's yet four months and in comes harvest? If you don't see the need to your people now, there'll probably be no harvest.

That's the thing some of us are trying to say. You know the condition. Have you seen a large electric sign with some of the letters out and others quivering like that? That's a picture of the membership of the average church today.

I don't know how many of your members are out, and I don't know how many are shaking. Oh, we need to be plugged into the socket of divine power, first of all. My Lord said, Go ye, but he first said, Pray ye.

I've heard sermons trying to get young people to say with Isaiah, Here am I, send me, when they've never said, Woe is me. You're not ready for, Here am I, when you've first said, Woe is me. The first item on God's program is repentance, and it's the last thing the Lord said to the church and the last thing the average church will do.

I know some of you are getting awfully tired of hearing me talk about things. You say, I keep on sewing on that same old string. Well, I'm like that old boy playing the cello who just kept sewing on one note, and somebody said, You don't play one that way.

You run your fingers up and down the note. Oh, I said, Those fellows are looking for the right note. I've already found it.

I know some of these boys today, they're still hunting the right note. Thank God, I've been sounding the note all through these years, and I'm sold on it, and I believe the first thing the church needs to do is repent. I know you can't repent all the time.

I know you can't grow a crop by breaking up the ground all the time. You have to do the rest. The seeds must be sown and the crops cultivated and the harvest gathered.

But you can't do anything else until you do break up the ground. My Bible says, Break up your fallow ground, sow not among thorns. A lot of Bible teaching today is just sowing seed in a briar patch.

The harvest has not been broken up. The church can do many things after she repents, but she can't do anything till she repents. Oh, she can build buildings and raise money and add more members and encompass sea and land for proselytes and put on programs and have a name to be alive and popular and prosperous.

But the Lord will steal it out of his mouth. Now, when Peter said, This is that, which was spoken to Joab, he was, of course, talking about the outpouring of the Spirit. But Joab, before he ever said anything about the outpouring of the Spirit, said, Go yourselves and lay minty, priests.

How ye ministers of the altar! Come, lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God, for the meat-offering and the drink-offering is withholding from the house of your God. Sanctify fast, call a solemn meeting. Gather the elders and the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God and cry unto the Lord.

That's repentance. Blow the trumpet in Zion. Sanctify fast, call a solemn assembly.

Gather the people. Sanctify the congregation. Assemble the elders.

Gather the children and those that suck the breath. Let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber and the bride out of her closet. Let the priest, here is the text he used earlier today, The ministers of the Lord weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage

to reproach that the heathen should rule over them.

Wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God? After that he will pour out his Spirit on all the place, and then whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Now, that's evangelism. Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

But what comes before this? Repentance on the part of God's people. That's the divine order. You can't change it.

Some time ago a seminary president on the West Coast lamented the fact that the social reforms of 19th century England grew out of spiritual revival, and he said the church today seems indifferent to such matters. But the difference is they had a revival, didn't they? We haven't had one. And we're trying to have the revival result without the revival.

Just a few months ago I had a meeting in First Baptist Church of Brunswick, Georgia. That's down on the coast, close by the great Methodist campground, Epworth-by-the-Sea, where John Wesley ministered and George Whitefield and Charles Wesley, back in 1735. I had the preacher to drive me over there one morning.

I said, I want to stay over here a while. And I walked around over that place and saw that wonderful marker that Bishop Arthur Moore had put up with these words of the great Methodist bishop on it. Let us read the story of John Wesley again.

This cultured, conscientious gentleman, resolute in self-demise, punctual in all observances, doing all to give his kids, and avoiding evil, had everything but peace in his own heart. Then the room in Aldersgate Street, and his face-to-face encounter with his Savior, presently that masterful little man climbed on his horse to set out on the conquest of England with only one resource, the assurance given him that Christ had taken away his sins. Soon that spark of grace set ten thousand hearts on fire.

I spent all morning over there by myself, meditating on John Wesley, and all the words that he gave in 1735 was before he was ready to preach. Don't forget that. I told that to the preacher boys at SNU some years ago when I was at the conference at First Church Dallas before it got so big they had to move over to the auditorium.

And I said to them, and I say it to you tonight, no man seemed better qualified for evangelism than Wesley. His mother, one of the greatest women ever lived, his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, all preachers. And he was an Oxford man, and a man of prayer, and separated from the world, and a man of rigid discipline.

He was a nomad of a work partner, but he was not ready to evangelize because he hadn't had a personal revival, and he had to have a confrontation with Jesus Christ three years later, 1738. As I walked along those sacred grounds all alone that morning, I could not resist the conclusion that for the most part we are today like a pre-orders-gate Wesley. We're like a pre-Pentecost church.

Wesley said, I came over here to convert the Indians. But who will convert me? And I have a suspicion that a lot of us today are trying to convert Indians, and we need a conversion. There are two kinds of conversion in the New Testament, Matthew 18, verse 3, except you be converted and become as little children.

That's conversion unto regeneration, and a lot of church members need that. And then the other one is Luke 22, verse 32, where Jesus said to Peter, When thou hast converted, strengthen the brethren, and a little later feed the sheep, and that's all the same thing. That's conversion unto renewal, and most of us need that.

Wesley faced an evangelistic challenge in America, but what he needed most was not the challenge that he saw in America, but the change that he felt that others gave him. And the big question before us tonight, beloved ears, is the change within us sufficient for the challenge before us? Are we ready within for what we face with us? John Wesley admitted his need, and God made it. And if only we could bring ourselves to a like admission, God would meet us, but we're rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing.

And so God is waiting, and the revival that started with John Wesley and shook the nation is waiting to begin. This is what was spoken of the Prophet Joseph, repentance, revival, and reaping. And the biggest business is to make sure that this is that.

And when this becomes that, and not before, then this bewildered world will ask, What shall we do?

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