

It's About Time

by Vance Havner

It's time for God to work and intervene in our lives to straighten out the iniquities and inequities of our world.

Duration: 38:08

Scripture: Proverbs 28:13, Isaiah 24:1, Jeremiah 4:3, Matthew 6:33, Romans 13:11, 2 Corinthians 6:17, James 4:8

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes that it is about time for God to intervene and address the iniquities and inequities of society. He highlights the disrespect and disregard for God's word, as well as the corruption and immorality prevalent in the world. The preacher acknowledges the importance of reaching out to the younger generation and speaking to them with authenticity and authority. He urges the congregation to seek the Lord and to cast away the works of darkness, emphasizing the need for righteousness and mercy. The sermon is based on passages from Psalm 119, Hosea 10, and Romans 13.

Transcript

You remember how it was when you look for a letter that just wouldn't come, and for a friend who wouldn't show up, and for an appointment that you couldn't get, and for a turn in business that didn't turn, and then one day it happened. The letter came, and the friend appeared, and the appointment came through. But by that time you were out of sorts and in an ugly mood, and about all you could manage to say was, well, it's about time.

And that's my subject tonight, it's about time. And there are three texts that almost say it, and do in meaning. Psalm 119, 126, it is time for thee, Lord, to work, for they have made void thy law.

Hosea 10, 12, so do yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy, break up your fallow ground. It is time to seek the Lord, till he come and reign righteousness upon you. And then in the New Testament, the familiar Romans 13, 11, and that knowing the time, that now it's high time, that's almost the same thing as saying it's about time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation year, and when we believe.

We're living in a time when civilization reminds me of an ape with a blowtorch playing in a room full of dynamite. It looks like the monkeys are about to operate the zoo, and the inmates are taking over the asylum. We have painted ourselves into a corner, and have become victims of the scientific monster that we've created.

Some time ago, somebody said that what youth needs today is a new hero in America, and we really haven't had one since Lindbergh. The men who went to the moon, of course, performed a far more difficult feat, but you don't remember their names. But when this youngster sat down in that crate of an airplane, no radio, no nothing, and took off for Paris, he had to have a lot of something that most of us don't have.

And after it was over, of course, the world was at his feet. He was an idol everywhere. Folks were so excited, even Calvin Coolidge got excited.

And that lasted for a while, but soon Lindy grew tired of all that adulation and fame. And then tragedy came along in the kidnapping and murder of his baby boy. Moved over to England to live, hobnobbed some with the Nazis.

Franklin D. Roosevelt called him a traitor. Eisenhower promoted him later on. He served in World War II in an advisory capacity, more or less.

Then he became interested in conservation and later discovered that he had a terminal disease. And in his usual characteristic fashion, he planned his own funeral. They buried him in a fatigue outfit in Hawaii in a plain grave.

I don't believe he was even embalmed, if I remember correctly, and on his tombstone the words, Though I mount up with the wings of the morning. But Lindy said this, I have lived to see the science I worship and the aircraft I loved destroying the civilization I expected them to serve. That tells you something of the disillusionment of that remarkable man.

And the world has something of that attitude today. All our grand inventions have gotten us into a predicament somehow. The experts have all the answers, but they don't even know what the question is.

I sat up some time ago, three hours at night, watching television, which is a record for me. Think of all the commercials you hear in three hours. But I couldn't stop because it was William L. Shirer's presentation of the career of Adolf Hitler.

And as I watched that maniac, that demoniac, that queer, strange character, standing before mass multitudes of Germans, block after block, as far as the eye could see. I didn't understand his German, but I didn't need to to realize here was a strange character with a hypnotic power that would make a nation as grand and wonderful and literate as Germany, the land of Beethoven and of many, many, many wonderful names in every field. Turn over its youth, turn over its money, turn over its government, turn over everything to it.

And Arnold Toynbee just couldn't understand that. The great historian just couldn't figure why a nation like Germany would let a wild man like Hitler, but the whole world, with them. And he arrived at this conclusion, which sounds like a preacher.

There must be a vein of original sin in human nature. Civilization is only a thin cake of custom, overlying a molten mass of wickedness, always boiling up for an opportunity to burst out. I think that's a pretty good statement of the situation.

There's only one explanation for the mess we're in worldwide tonight. And we're in the worst mess we've ever been in ever since Adam and Eve ate us out of house and home in the Garden of Eden. You won't hear much about the cause of this trouble, the real cause.

It will not be discussed in Congress. You won't hear much about it in the U.N. You can't even pray there out loud. You won't hear about it in the universities.

You won't hear about it in the scientific centers, but it's in the text. The cause of the trouble. We have made void the law of God.

That's it. God's still on the throne, the Lord God omnipotent reigneth, and he has given us certain laws, physical, moral, and spiritual. We may not like the way some of them operate, but that's the way it is.

God made marriage in the home to be the basis of society. And the increasing multitude today that get married, live as husband and wife without getting married, need to learn that that's not the way it is. Be not deceived.

God's not mocked. You can't break the laws of God. I hear about that every once in a while.

Nobody ever broke the laws of God. You break yourself against them. Might as well try to attack Gibraltar with a pop gun.

It's to go up against the laws of God. Won't work. You jump off a skyscraper, you don't break the law of gravitation.

Break your neck, but not the law of gravitation. My Lord said lawlessness. And if you are so foolish, if anyone listening tonight is so foolish as to think you can be them all and escape the consequences.

There are all kinds of devices today to avoid the results, but none to avoid the consequences. And so the harvest is diseased bodies and crooked brains and blasted lives. Suicides in a day when we've made void God's law and think we can get away with it.

Homosexuality, drugs, streets not safe to walk on, not only at night, but in the daytime. Homes unsafe. When I was growing up in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Western North Carolina, we had our revival in the summertime at the little church up the road.

We never locked up the house to go to a meeting. Nobody would break in. It was safe.

Now I live in motels and the other day I was in one where they had the telephone screwed to the table. You heard about that woman who said one little notice up just for fun, but at a point said, we will now accept dogs. We have not admitted dogs, but we can have dogs stay here now.

I said, after all, no dog ever set the place on fire with a cigarette. Said, if you can get your dog to vouch for you, we'll let you stay here. And yet on the other hand, there's the serious side to this strange paradox of progress.

I was in Jacksonville in meetings and when the last batch of astronauts went up and I watched it on the television over in the corner, and then I could look out the window into a park where I dared not walk. Smart enough to walk on the moon, but not safe enough to walk in the park. That is the paradox of progress today.

There's no room in the jails for the criminals if they could even be caught. There's no time to try them. The dockets are full.

Capital punishment is frowned upon, although God Almighty started it. Authority is no longer recognized in home, school, or church. Some time ago a school principal said to the students, and said to the teachers, don't tell the students to obey.

That's out. Tell them to cooperate, but not to obey. Now cooperate's not the word my daddy used when I was growing up.

If I had not cooperated, he'd operate it. You can be sure we've made void. You see it in every realm.

You see it in the field of art. You look at some of these surrealistic, modernistic nightmares that are getting so much attention today. I heard of one the other day that was hung up by mistake upside down in an art exhibit and won the prize.

And then there's rock and roll. I never have called it music. It's just an excuse for not being able to make music.

And the liquor business was once denounced from the total abstinences considered Victorian and puritanical. We talk about what to do about alcoholism, but nobody seems to want to do much about alcohol. And that's simply a matter of trying to mop up the floor while you leave the faucet running.

There is only one answer to this dilemma today, and it's in the text. It's time for God to work. It's about time.

It's about time for God to intervene to straighten out the iniquities and the inequities of this Sodom and Gomorrah. It's time for God to bring to judgment a generation that has laughed in his face and pronounced him dead and denied his word and disowned his son and turned his holy day into a holiday. It's time for God to show up blind leaders of the blind, and what's worse, bland leaders of the bland who go around dusting off sin with a powder puff and spreading cold cream on canisters.

It's about time for this generation, this young generation, to learn anew that old verse of the old book, Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart share thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart and in the sight of thine eyes. But know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. I've been preaching for 64 years, but I have a better response today from young people than I've ever had in those years.

All this talk about the communication gaps, a lot of eye wash, because I think that if the young people feel that you're genuine and not a phony, and you speak with authority, and you lay it on the line, most of them will respond. I see that all over this land. They didn't create this situation.

After all, they inherited it, and you know who they got it from. I find I'm amazed today at the number of sub-teenagers, little folks that come and make intelligent comments about the sermon. They heard it.

But in such a time, I keep saying, remember that God will bring me into judgment. Don't forget it. But God also works in mercy, and it's about time for God to work in reviving his church.

So that brings in the other text. One is God's business, the other is our business. It's time for God to work, that's God's business.

It's time to seek the Lord, that's our business. The churches have made void God's love. Too many have begun in the Spirit and are trying to perfect themselves in the flesh.

Methods have been borrowed from the world. David is hauling the ark on a new cart these days. The Spirit of the shop has invaded the sanctuary.

Preacher studies have become offices, and corporation methods have taken the place of consecrated men, and human busyness has supplanted the Father's business. It's about time to seek the Lord. I like the homely phrases in my old Bible, Break up your fallow ground.

Most folks know what fallow ground is, especially if you grew up in the country. It's ground that has lain idle and undisturbed and uncultivated until all it now produces is weeds and briars and brambles, and it's unproductive of anything worthwhile because it's undisturbed. And human hearts get like that because Jesus told us about four kinds of soil.

Frankly, I wonder whether we'll ever have another. Oh, you say God can do anything? Yes, he can, but Jesus said a lot depends on the sower, and that's your heart. I'm sure that the sower would not appreciate it when the farmer came along with the sharp plow, and if the sower had feelings and could talk, would say, why is he putting this sharp plow into my heart? Because if you're going to have any harvest, there must be the breaking up of the fallow ground.

Again in the Bible it says that Moab hath settled on his leaves and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel. The church, the individual church and the individual Christian needs to be shaken up and emptied from vessel to vessel. There's a stirring process.

Sometimes your medicine bottle has only shake well before using. That's what God has to do with some of his people. Shake them well before they're ever usable.

Paul wrote to Timothy, you stir up the gift of God within you. Don't wait for a love when the lemonade is still sour, although there's sugar in it. It's because it's at the bottom and it needs to be stirred.

And I know some dear people who I think maybe will get to heaven when they die, but my soul they're not sweet. And they do need to be stirred. I heard of a preacher the other day who was asked, what's the size of your pasture? And he says, 25 miles wide and one inch deep.

That's what bothers a lot of preachers these days. I was pastor from 34 to 39 of the oldest Baptist church in the South and the first one in the Southern Baptist convention, really. First Baptist, Charleston, South Carolina.

I was there last fall for meetings. They're getting ready to celebrate their 300th anniversary. 1682.

I was not pastor at that time, however, but that's when it starts. And I stood in Park Street Congregational Church in Boston some years ago and said to them, I said, you can't stop Baptist because I said, you ran William Scraven out of New England for his convictions. He came all the way to Charlestown, as they called it then, a little village, and started the old Southern Baptist convention.

But during that time I conducted chapel a number of times at the military college there, the Citadel. Had the baccalaureate once. And the commandant was General Summerall.

He'd been chief of staff. He fought beside Douglas MacArthur in World War I. He was every inch a soldier of the old school. I liked him.

I believe he was a Christian. He was a sturdy type. Didn't say much, and that made what he did say all the more important.

And I remember one time, the person in the cadets follow, and I don't get to march with a general often, so I tried to keep in step. But when we got out there, he wheeled and took my hand and said, thank you. You get under these boys' hides.

And I thought that was one of the best compliments I ever had in my life. That's what preaching ought to do. That's what the word of God does.

It ought to get down under that topsoil and do some subsoil. I was in a church in Jackson, Mississippi, a First Baptist church and meetings, and as the people went out, the pastor said that morning, well, we did some subsoil in here this morning, and it's about time. Because it has been put this way about one type of soil, the stony ground.

Represents those who enjoy listening to sermons, but somehow the message never gets through to them. It doesn't take root and grow. They know the message is true and sort of believe it.

But when the hot winds of persecution blow, they lose interest. I've preached to people like that through all these years. I'm amazed at how few people know the difference between a revival and an evangelistic meeting.

I sometimes doubt ever convincing people that they're entirely different. Revivals don't have anything to do with sinners, except that evangelism is a product of revival. But a revival is a work of the Spirit of God among Christians, whereby they get right with God and with each other in evangelism, the preaching of the gospel throughout.

And revival means conviction of sin, confession of sin, forsaking of sin. It's not enough to ask God to take away your sins if you're not willing to put them away. Whoso covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

It means separation from the world. I don't hear much about that anymore. That old subject's out.

Separation. They've got a new word for a lot of things today, and they call worldliness now secularism. Nobody knows what that is, so that lets the preacher off the hook.

He can talk long as he pleases on secularism. Nobody knows what he's talking about. It means submitting to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

It means being filled with the Holy Spirit. And it doesn't begin with the backsliders. It begins with the best people in the Church.

Not with the Christmas and Easter crowd, but with the crowd which they ever send it. And it's so hard to get that across to them. It's about time we quit playing church and these services that start at 11 o'clock sharp and end at 12 o'clock dull.

You will never see a revival in a comfortable church. Donald Gray Barnhouse in his treatment of the book of Revelation, speaking of the church at Laodicea. And Jesus, you remember, said, I'd rather you be cold than just warm.

Well, you've forgotten that, I'm afraid. He said, I want you to be boring. And Barnhouse said, if you're cold, you may get cold enough to hunt the fire.

But if you're lukewarm, you're comfortable. And the hardest church on earth to wake up to is a comfortable church. I've been in some churches that have been bubbling for 25 years, never have come to a boil yet.

Sometimes in the restaurant, the waitress will come up to me and say, may I warm up your coffee? And I've got half a cup yet, but I say, no, pour out this. And let's start over, because I don't want any Laodicean coffee, neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm. I guess she doesn't.

And the Lord doesn't want lukewarm. There's another way God will break through one of these days. And you've already anticipated me.

Jesus will come again. And some of us are beginning to feel it's about time. Paul Harvey said, Christians believe Jesus Christ will return and take over when mortals have made a hopeless mess of self-government.

Well, then he ought to be back any day. We have succeeded. Creation groans in pain, the creatures groan.

The whole creation stands on tiptoe. One of the translations puts it, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. There's a longing in nature.

I don't think that's just my imagination. I could quote to you A.T. Robertson and some of our finest writers, and go to the German writer and others who felt in their time when they were out in some lovely spot and listening to the birds sing. Many times I'm a sort of a bird watcher, and in the spring especially, when I'm in a lonely place and listen to a wood thrush singing his vespers at the end of a perfect day, I almost, and I don't think I fancy, but I feel a sort of a longing on the part of the whole creation for a better day.

I don't know what they're thinking about. I'm not putting words in their mouths, but there is a sense in which the whole creation longs. I don't think it's wrong for a Christian to be homesick for heaven.

Some people say, well, that's sort of morbid. I don't know why you say that. Paul said he longed to be with Christ, which is far, far better.

That little word far, that doesn't say it. It takes several fars to say that far, far better. There's nothing wrong with wanting to go.

Who wants to stick around here forever? I heard of a fellow the other day who was seasick, and I mean seasick, on the boat, and he was leaning over the rail. One of these cheerful souls came along, always show up in the most miserable times, slapped him on the back, chair up, seasickness, never cured anybody, and the poor fellow said, don't tell me that. It's the hope of dying that's kept me alive this long.

One thing that keeps me going these days is not just the hope of dying, but I'm waiting. The redemption of the body and the redemption of creation. They used to have a song, the world is waiting for the sunrise, and it's waiting for the S-O-N sunrise, the sun of righteousness, healing's in his wings.

Signs of the times are everywhere, there's a brand new feeling in the air. Fix your eyes upon the eastern sky, lift up your head, your redemption draws nigh. I think we ought to spell that eastern with a capital E, because if you know what's going on today, and you know that little nation over there that all hell's not

going to budge in the last analysis, because God's got his plans.

Did you see Time Magazine last week, the front cover of it, with all these little nations, Iran and the rest of it, and the big bear leaning over, looking down on them? We're in strange and amazing times. I think it was a brave thing for Mr. Sadat to go over to Jerusalem and address the Knesset. I remember when Woodrow Wilson went to Paris for peace, when Franklin D. Roosevelt went to Yalta on the Manhattan.

Somebody said the Messiah is not on the Manhattan. Truman went to Potsdam, L.B.J. went to Glasgow, Nixon went to China, Mr. Carter's been overseas. And if they could halt one war, I would appreciate that.

But peace on earth awaits something else. It awaits the coming of our Lord, and Douglas MacArthur summed it up when he said, the problem is basically theological. That's a pretty good statement.

God's in it. God's got the answer. And it's in this old book.

I used to hear about a camp meeting back in the old days where one night it looked like a storm was coming up, and they didn't even have lanterns in those days, certainly no flashlights. And the preacher had to walk down by a dangerous cliff, a little ways to where he was staying, and an old farmer, nothing else, got together some lighters, we called them in the Blue Ridge Mountains, pine, wood, and set them on fire. And he brought that torch to the preacher, he said, this will see you home.

And the preacher said, I don't know about that, what if it rains? It'll see you home. What if it, the wind blows it out, but that farmer knew his pine lighters, he said it'll see you home. And it did.

Many years ago my father and mother put into my hands an old book. They said, it'll be a lamp for your feet, and it'll be a light for your path. There were times when the winds of doubt blew pretty hard.

The storms seemed to dampen the glow. Sometimes the darkness was frightening, but that old light has seen me through to this good hour. They've tried to bury that old book, but the corpse has a habit of coming to life in the midst of the interment, and outlives all the pallbearers.

Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I've already come. Once in a while somebody says, would you like to live your life over? Live my life over when I'm this near home? I'm not interested. Who wants to go back? Some of us may leave under difficult circumstances, because sometimes God's children go home under sad and dark circumstances.

On a cloudy day, in sorrow or in pain, for one thing's certain, God may put some of us to bed in the dark, but he'll get us all up in the morning. That's what I'm looking for. It's the irony of ironies that with the most elaborate timekeeping devices we've ever had, we'll wear on our sophisticated watches and clocks, stare at us from every direction, and we can see things happen as well as hear about it on television, and yet there's never been a generation as ignorant of the answer to one little question.

What time is it? I have before me tonight this old book, and it's God's timepiece, and it's been ticking for centuries. Sometimes it has seemed slow, but it's never been late. That old clock was set by God Almighty.

Heaven and earth may pass away, but it won't. And bless God, it's on standard time, sure enough. And woe unto us if we try to set it back or push it forward.

And you'll find that if you dig into it, as Dr. Phillips says, you'll have the sensation of an electrician rewiring an old house where the power has not been cut off. You'll get a shock. And you'll get a charge.

It has its own alarm, too. And God have mercy on the man who turns it off or sleeps through its morning. But one thing's certain, it's later than we think, and only God knows what time it is.

My old daddy used to have a saying, nothing's ever settled till it's settled right, and nothing's ever settled right till it's settled with God. That's why our homes are pulling apart today. They go to psychiatrists, they go to counselors, and they don't go to God.

And they're unstuck again because it starts with God. Watchman, what of the night? When shall I wait and the night be gone? I never did like night. I always, that's one reason I get up so miserably early.

I don't know what for except to watch daytime, because I love the daytime. Many years ago I had two years of insomnia, and I mean insomnia and depression. I'll never forget it.

And five years ago when loneliness descended upon me, and I've spoken of that before in the departure of my dear companion for heaven, I said, oh, it'll be bad. And my doctor said, well, here's some Valium, take some of those that might help. I took three or four, and I said, now Lord, I don't want to get hooked on this, because that thing is going around the rounds today, and I forget how many million almost live on it.

It has its place to be sure when properly used. But in my loneliness I said, Lord, if I know anything about what the Bible says, you're the night watchman of the whole universe. You never go to bed.

And it cheered me to hear some time ago, somebody say over radio or television, God's up all night. And if somebody listening to me tonight is going through a trying time, and you've wet the pillow with your tears, and sleep departs, please remember, you think you're the only one awake, but you're not. There's no other.

But remember, God's up all night. He's always available. And I think of that old bishop who couldn't sleep until two in the morning, and he got up and started reading his Bible, and he says, no use you sitting up late, he that keepeth Israel neither slumber nor sleep.

He said, well, Lord, if you're sitting up, I'm going to bed. Good night. One of these days it'll be daylight forever.

And as we face anarchy in the world and apostasy in the professing church and apathy in the true church, it's about time. And if you don't know Jesus, now is the accepted time. Now is the day of salvation.

We used to sing in the old revivals, tomorrow's sun may never rise to bless thy long-deluded sight. This is the time, O then be wise. But why not tonight? Our Lord told us about the farmer who waxed prosperous and said, I've got to tear down these old barns and build bigger ones, and I'm going to do that.

And I'm going to say to my soul, take it easy, thou hast good as laid up for many years. And then God spoke up and said, you've got the wrong clock. You're going tonight.

There's a lot of difference between many years and tonight. Don't you ever tell your soul to take it easy. That's what's the matter with too many folks now.

Get out that old hymn book and learn how to sing that one that's been in the mothballs too long. Awake, my soul, stretch every nerve and press with vigor on. A heavenly race demands thy zeal and an immortal crown.

Many years, this night, there's a lot of difference. Beloved, it's about time we set our watches with the timekeeper of the universe. My father spoke to a young fellow out there in the country a long time ago about his soul.

And this fellow said, well, Mr. Hadner, I'm a young man. I've got lots of time, lots of time. My father was not much for that sort of talk, and he didn't brook much foolishness.

I don't think you'd find this approach listed in any book on how to do personal work. But father said, you remind me of a fellow in the Bible that God called a fool. And three weeks later, that fellow joined the church.

They said, what brings you here? He said, it started. And Mr. Hadner said, I reminded him of a man in the Bible that God called a fool. It paid off one time.

I'll say that. And we ought to end, I think, the way we began with that admonition, Romans 13, that knowing the time that now is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand.

Now here's where we come in. Let us, therefore, cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and ending.

And then that double barrel last verse 14 starts with a positive and ends with a negative. Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts. What time is it? It's time for God to work.

It's time to seek the Lord. It's time to wake up. It's about time.

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