

Knowing What to Do

by Vance Havner

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the times and knowing what to do, highlighting the promise of the Lord's return, the possibility of revival, and the prospect of retribution.

Duration: 26:10

Scripture: Daniel 12:4, Matthew 24:44, Luke 1:17, Luke 4:24, Romans 14:17, 1 Corinthians 12:28, Revelation 2:20

Topics: "Revival"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of understanding the overall purpose of God in history when discussing current events in the light of the Bible. He uses the story of Rip and the wrong George to illustrate how people often miss the mark when it comes to understanding God's plan. The preacher also highlights the futility of trying to create a kingdom of heaven out of unregenerate humanity and warns against the dangers of pursuing political projects without considering God's purpose. He concludes by discussing the promise of the Lord's return and the need for righteousness, as well as the potential consequences of ignoring God's warnings and living in moral decay.

Transcript

In 1 Chronicles 12:32 we read that the children of Issachar had understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do. It does not say that they merely had a knowledge of the times. Plenty of people have a knowledge of the times, but they don't know what to do.

Dr. Toynbee, Will Durant, men like that have a knowledge of the times. They don't know much about what to do in these times. One of the outstanding characteristics of this age is ignorance, believe it or not.

One trouble is so much of it is educated ignorance. Our Lord said, Ye do err not knowing, that's ignorance, not knowing two things, the scriptures and the power of God. When a man doesn't know the scriptures and the power of God, he's an ignoramus.

He may be a Ph.D., but in his case that only means phenomenal dirt. The children of Issachar had understanding of the times which produced a knowledge of what Israel, what God's people ought to do. I believe in the kind of knowledge that gets people to do something.

I heard of a business firm some time ago that decided to take out group insurance and everybody agreed but one man, though he wouldn't have it. The boss said, I'll take care of him. He went over there and said,

I hear you don't want to take out company insurance.

That's right. Well, the boss said, is that your tool kit there? Yes. Well, lock it up.

And is that your lunch box? Yes. Well, shut it up and go out through the office and pick up your check and keep on going. Well, the man said, I'm ready to sign up right now.

Well, the boss said, why didn't you do it earlier? He said, I never had it explained to me that way before. I believe in explaining the scriptures in such a way that if we are to understand the times, beloved, and know what God's people ought to do, there are four considerations that we ought to keep in mind. The first of these is the promise of our Lord's return.

The Church missed the road when she quit looking for the King to come back and started building the kingdom down here. The kingdom is, of course, at present a spiritual kingdom, not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. And the righteousness comes first.

A great many people are like a man with a broken arm who doesn't want the arm set. He only wants a shot to make him feel better. There are many people in congregations who do only get right, be right, do right.

All they want is a shot to make them feel better. But while the kingdom is at present spiritual, the reign of God in the hearts of men, it is going to be a visible kingdom which will not be brought in by education, legislation or reformation. The King will set it up when he comes back, and it will not be the great society.

And if we understood that, there wouldn't be so many misguided souls riding all kinds of queer bandwagons, trying to bring in a counterfeit millennium, superimpose a false kingdom of heaven and a profane paradise on an unregenerate society. You've read about Rip Van Winkle. He went to sleep and slept through a revolution.

Not the only man who ever did that, of course. When you went to sleep, George III was the ruler of America, and when you woke up, George Washington was President of the United States. Rip didn't know the difference.

He started hooping it up for the King and almost got put in jail. He was hollering for the wrong George. There are a lot of people today who are hollering for the wrong George.

You might as well try to explain a sunset to a blind man or play music for a deaf man or catch sunbeams with a fishhook. You might as well try to explain nuclear physics to a monument in a city park as to talk about current events in the light of the Bible to the man on the street. It's casting pearls before swine and that which is holy to dogs.

It's impossible to understand any of the issues today out of the context of the overall purpose of God in history. Any and all of our schemes and political projects to create a kingdom of heaven out of unregenerate men are doomed from the start. The Chinese have a proverb, you cannot carve rotten wood.

You can't make anything out of rotten wood and you cannot carve an enduring social order out of unregenerate humanity. We need old Will Rogers with us these days. I wonder what he'd say when the first disarmament conference was being held in London, when we threw away battleships and had to build more.

Will said, those fellows might get somewhere if it wasn't for human nature. Now when you think that one over, he really said something. That's why we never get together.

The only way we understand the meaning of history is in the light of the two advents of Jesus Christ. Otherwise, what we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history. The early Christians were not only ready for the Lord to come back, they were expectant.

When I hear a man say, oh, of course I believe in the Lord's return, I know he doesn't believe in it much. He's not really looking for the Lord. Dr. Campbell Morgan said, I never lay my head on the pillow at night without thinking before morning comes, the final morning may have dawned.

Paul Harvey said, it is the Christian's conviction that Christ will return and take over when mortals have made a hopeless mess of self-government. Then we shouldn't have very long to wait. The world is not going to be converted, it ought to be evangelized.

Constantine tried to evangelize paganism and wound up paganizing Christianity. He didn't convert the world, he didn't Christianize it, he just Constantinized it. The Church controlled the culture then for quite a while, but today the world controls the culture and a great deal of the Church.

Now, of course, when I talk about the Lord's return, I'm not referring to some of these prophecy experts who run around with a bed sheet and a yardstick trying to explain the meaning of every toe on every beast in Revelation. But I do not believe we ought to go to the other extreme. Dr. Henson out on the West Coast preached a great sermon one Sunday on the Lord's return and some seminary students didn't agree with it, and after the benediction they came up.

One of them said, Dr., we just can't get that out of the New Testament the way you preached it. He said, of course you can't, it's in there to stay. It is in there to stay, thank the Lord.

Dr. A.J. Gordon of Boston believed it, and it was said the advocacy of that doctrine cost him much. It seems to awaken suspicion and lead to estrangement, this great doctrine of hope. Dr. Gordon said it's not wanted by churches with millionaire merchants and by great universities.

And yet it was for the assertion of this doctrine, Dr. Gordon said, that our Lord was crucified because Matthew 26, 24 tells us that at the trial of Jesus, the minute he said, I'm coming back, then the pot really boiled over. That brought it really to a head. So the early church went out with the glorious proclamation of Christ come, the prospect of Christ coming in the power of Christ's contemporary.

Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever. But we have more to do than to sit with folded hands and wait to be rescued by his return. So there is in the second place the possibility of a great revival.

A visitation from above, God coming down in the latter reign of spiritual awakening. There have been such revivals in the days of Wesley, the American revivals, the Welsh revival, the Shantung revival. You and I haven't seen revivals like that.

That's where we are handicapped. We've seen some local revivals in churches or maybe on a college campus, but we've not seen nations move before God-like wheat fields before a summer breeze. Sometimes I wonder whether we can ever have a deep revival in a shallow generation.

You say God can do anything, yes, but don't forget that our Lord in the parable of the sower of the seed and the sower spoke of that type of hearer who receives the word with joy but has no date and no root and doesn't last. I heard of a preacher the other day who was asked, How large is your pastorate? And he said, It's twenty miles wide and one inch deep. That's the situation too generally today.

Now, a revival does not have all the answers, however. Pentecost was a revival, but it didn't convert Jerusalem. Jerusalem went on to judgment.

There was a revival before the Civil War. There was a revival before the Korean War. A revival is like a sale in a department store.

It's more spectacular, but the main business is done in the daily merchandising the year round. Revivals make big headlines, but when the books are added up at the last day, I believe it will be found that the main work was done by the faithful preaching of ordinary preachers, the daily witnessing of ordinary Christians, soul winning in the Sunday school and in the home. But we do need a great revival, and while we cannot produce it, we can pray for it and prepare for it.

Some time ago they had an unusual spell of smog out in Los Angeles, and the meteorologist said only a wind from elsewhere can dispel this fog. And that set me thinking. The world is smog bound today.

Conditions of low visibility prevail. Man groups in polluted darkness. Politically, morally we live in a blinding haze.

Black and white have become a smudge of indefinite gray. What was once clear is now fuzzy and indistinct. The other day a college was advertising itself and said we have over 3,000 students.

They meant to say in our midst, but they left out the D and it read we have over 3,000 students in our midst. Well, that's where a lot of them are these days over the land. And only the breath of God can dispel the miasmas that grip mankind.

The Church is smog bound too. The other day two Indians who had been watching a lighthouse go up for some time came to see the grand opening. It was quite an affair with the light and the bell and the horn.

Just about the time for it to begin operations one of the worst fogs of all blew in. And one Indian said to the other light shine, bell ring, horn blow, but fog come in just the same. We've never had more light shining and bells ringing and horns blowing in the Church than we have today.

And only the Holy Spirit who came like a mighty rushing wind at Pentecost can scatter that fog. Let me change the figure for a moment. The other day I saw on a church bulletin the lowest ebb is the turn of the tide.

Things are pretty low ebb today, beloved. The next thing on the program is the turn of the tide. What that tide will bring, I don't know.

It may bring the return of the Lord, it may bring revival to the Church. And if it doesn't, it will bring in the third place retribution, the prospect of retribution. America is at Belshazzar's feast and that feast was characterized by revelry, revelation and retribution.

America is on a national binge. We're not yet 200 years old and we're dying of moral cancer. We're going to have to change our national emblem from an eagle to a vulture.

When Billy Graham was gathering his statistics for his book *World Aflame*, his wife Ruth looked over his shoulder and as she saw these formidable, frightening figures she said, if God doesn't judge America he'll have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah. And then there's revelation. God's writing on the wall.

Thank God there was one man who understood the times. Modern prophets with new techniques don't sound much like Daniel. If you're going to be popular in Babylon today you must learn how to talk out of both sides of your mouth work both sides of the street and be an expert at almost saying something.

John the Baptist knew how to reprove a king but he wasn't up on communication, dialogue and public relations. He wasn't a guest in Herod's palace, he was a prisoner in Herod's jail. And certainly we wouldn't think of calling the king a fox as our Lord did.

Your modern Daniel in Babylon is quite at home in the Feast of Belshazzar while he might even have a fling at the Watusi himself. Thank God at the original Feast of Belshazzar the Queen could say, there is a man who knows what time it is and who can read what God is saying. I'm glad Daniel didn't get up scared half to death and say, I can't read it.

Too many prophets and too many pulpits today cannot decipher the heavenly hieroglyphics they can't read the writing on the wall and others try to cheer everybody up by saying there is no special significance to the signs of the times. Then I'm glad Daniel didn't read something else he could have, they wouldn't have known the difference. There are prophets today who read out of God's revelation what never was in it.

And the average American is so ignorant of the word of God that he doesn't know the difference anyhow. I'm glad Daniel didn't read just part of it. There are prophets in Babylon today who are afraid of the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

No God had a man who could read it, read it all and read it right. I know that the dictionary to one of our most popular commentaries today says that Daniel ought to cure us of predicting the future since he tried and failed. I know that we've been misled by those who would make Daniel's 4th world power to be Greece instead of Rome and who never see any further than Antiochus Epiphanes but my Lord said whoso readeth Daniel let him understand and read Daniel we will and make our way through the Babylon of Revelation 17 and 18 until Babylon is no more and then we'll join that innumerable throng in Revelation 19 singing Hallelujah for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth God give us prophets in Babylon who will decline the table of Nebuchadnezzar and disregard the decrees of Darius and stand at Belshazzar's feast and read to this frightened generation what God is writing on the wall for us today.

I'm very much interested in the ministry of the New Testament prophet. I can't find anything on the subject. I've ransacked libraries and it's almost impossible to find much on the work of the New Testament prophet.

We have pastors, teachers and evangelists but very little is said about the prophet and there is no prophet discernible on the horizon today I'm speaking of course not of foretellers but of foretellers who speak for God to the nation and to the church they're disturbers of the peace they're Daniels who keep Darius awake all night they're John the Baptist who spoils for Herod they're deplasers of a king's palace they're without honor in their own country they're scorned by the scribes and they're the object of the hatred of all Jezebels little religious clerics complain because they can't control them their contemporaries stone them and the next generation builds monuments to their memory they're accountable to no committee they do their thinking and they formulate their strategy far from

the petty bickerings of religious politics their policy is not determined by swivel chair experts they're accused of living in ivory towers but most of us are so close to the field that we can't really see the issue we can't see the forest for the trees the prophet is the man apart who sees the whole program Barclay says the settled ministry began to resent the intrusion of these wandering prophets who often disturbed their congregations the settled ministry always tends to resent the itinerant the prophet is a square, he's an odd number in a standardized, collectivized, regimented society he walks alone Amos was not chummy with Jeroboam II John the Baptist was not a favorite in the courts of Herod Amaziah wasn't popular Amos was not popular at Bethel in the courts of Amaziah organized,

institutional religion always clashes with the voice of dissent as Elijah did on Carmel as Micaiah did when they wanted to go up against Ramoth Gilead as our Lord did with the Pharisees they're not favorites in king's palaces Elijah was the bane of Ahab's existence an old John Knox was a thorn the Queen Mary who said, I fear that man's prayers more than the armies of Richard the Lionheart you remember that Ahab said to Elijah art thou he that troublest Israel the fact of the case was that Ahab was the troublemaker Elijah was the troubleshooter big business employs such men to look out for bugs in business, God needs such men in the church today divinely equipped for the job they have an instinct for locating trouble and a genius for exposing it of course they're not popular it's much more

pleasant to be a Gamaliel keeping everything quiet in Jerusalem than a Paul exceedingly stirring up Philippi such men are called troublemakers they don't create the situation, they just reveal it they don't put delinquent Christians on the spot such Christians are already on the spot the prophet merely reveals the spot we need some sanctified troubleshooters today there's trouble aplenty, not much demand prophets are disturbing of course he plays havoc with the serenity school and irritates the tranquilizers and just when the false prophets of a peaceful coexistence have lured everybody to rest at ease in Zion here comes a prophet through the neighborhood with a siren that cries aloud and spares not and while scholars write wordy volumes that nobody reads anyhow the prophet says it in one

colorful paragraph you say but doesn't the Bible say blessed are the peacemakers yes, but the surest way to have peace is to deal with the troubles that prevent it a sick man has no peace because he has trouble and the doctor has to be a troubleshooter before he can be a peacemaker may there be somewhere in my congregation this day and I pray for this everywhere I go may there be somewhere in the backwoods maybe even in North Carolina a solitary lad who will walk in prophetic succession is it too much to hope that there will yet arise in the sunset of this age a prophet of the Lord besides as Jehoshaphat put it are we too far gone to pray that however unthinkable such a calling may seem to the average seminarian some heartiest soul will see to it that the prophet shall not perish from the

earth I'm very much impressed by this young man I heard him a couple of years ago on TV out of Jackson, Mississippi you ought to read his story he was born in Nazareth he's got an amazing background I believe to hand the gods on him I don't do much endorsing anymore but I had a chat with him a while ago in prayer back there in the corner I always like to feel it may be from some unsuspected source God may raise up our man a prophet we thank God for every evangelist, every pastor every teacher, God bless them all but we still need a Daniel in Babylon and revelation tells us of a final Babylon I didn't get to see the future Amulet at the World's Fair but I liked the one old John Sullivan Patton was a long time ago I like that one, I believe we're getting pretty close to the lined up and it

was Dr.

Torrance, the professor of dogmatics in Edinburgh who said the number of 666 is the number of so-called Christian civilization without Jesus Christ the number of every attempt to organize this world in a form that appears marvelously Christian but is in reality anti-Christian therefore while we wait for the return and pray for the revival and face the retribution what can we do besides just be faithful, is that all? no brethren, I don't believe that's all I believe there's one thing more we can do I believe that we need to get on an emergency basis the hour is too late and the need is too great to go about it as though we had a thousand years the urgency must match the emergency we must quit living ordinary lives in extraordinary times and so I suggest that along with the promise of the return and the possibility of revival and the prospect of retribution I suggest the program of the remnant I believe we need to rally a master's minority the church within the church, the faithful few, the company of the committed I believe that new book I just saw out on the book table calls it the incendiary fellowship a task force, a spearhead of expendables a dedicated minority, scorning the values of this world and living under stringent discipline my Lord said to Laodicea, I'm about to spew you out of my mouth and he did, that's exactly what happened and he said, I've got one more proposition if anybody will hear my voice and open the door he's assembling the innuends and I believe that's what the Lord is doing now Dr.

Torrey used to say in order to have a revival let a few members of any church get thoroughly right with God Billy Graham thinks that if he were a pastor he'd start with six or eight or ten men our Lord started with twelve George Whitfield I think was a greater preacher than John Wesley but John Wesley was wise enough to leave little societies after him that carried on the work now we have small groups springing up all over the country good, bad and indifferent, but the principle is sound we've been doing it the extensive way I believe we need to do it the intensive way we've been trying to do it the big way, maybe we ought to start doing it the little way a lot of our mobilization hasn't been anything but mobilization Gideon started out with 32,000 you remember, and God said you've got too many you take the credit if you want we have too many soldiers now of the kind we have for the kind of battle we're out to fight and the kind of victory that we're out to win the average church member knows nothing about spiritual warfare doesn't know that the battle is the Lord's and the weapons of our warfare not carnal, the average run-of-the-mill church member knows nothing about Ephesians 6 it's a foreign language we keep saying if we had more members, more money, more methods bless your heart, we have too many now of the kind that most of them are you know there are three kinds of lies, white lies, black lies and statistics and if we won, we'd take the credit and God said to Gideon, I don't want that of cowards and careless, but by nucleus of the consecrated and the competent you've heard me say before now, that you never start a fire with the back log, you start it with the kindling wood Mr.

Moody started one of his meetings rather slowly, and when some of the pastors got worried he said, now wait a minute, how do you start a fire? you start it with a few. Gideon's victory began however, with Gideon, and that's where the preacher comes in what kind of man was Gideon? he was burdened over the times, if God be with us that's why has all this befallen us he wanted to see God work, where be all the miracles that our fathers told us of he was conscious of his own weakness my family is poor in Manassas, and I'm the least in my father's house he destroyed the altar of Baal, the dearest idol I have known, whatever that idol be help me to tear it from its throne and worship only thee martial folks used to say that the battle is won the day before, and Gideon won his battle the day before by his concern and his consecration and his commitment and his cooperation with God in eliminating the unfit and concentrating on the 300 now I don't mean we're to excommunicate the unfaithful don't get me wrong I was with a preacher some time ago, they'd dropped 800 names in a row and he got a letter saying, what in the world are you doing over there while you've lost us nearly a thousand members what if everybody would do that,

well I know what would happen if all the Baptist churches would do that, we'd get behind the Methodists unless the Methodists did it, then I don't know what would happen but after all, beloved the 31,700 in Gideon's crowd came in on the last part of the battle don't forget that and I believe that if we began with a dedicated minority others would ultimately join us and come to the help of the Lord against the mighty but don't start with them, start with the kindling wood thank God there are 7,000 who have not bowed to them God's program is a Gideon's 300 and the battle will be won by the assembly of the only ones by the master's minority who are like the children of Issachar have understanding of the times to know what is real what God's people ought to do, and in order to understand them we must keep before us the promise of the Lord's return the possibility of revival, the prospect of retribution and the program of the resurrection

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