

Miracles After Forty - Hope Does Not Die With Aging

by Vance Havner

Vance Havner's sermon encourages older individuals to seek spiritual revival and recognize that miracles can occur at any age, particularly after 40.

Duration: 33:57

Scripture: Judges 6:13, Joel 2:16-18, Matthew 6:33, Acts 4:14, 2 Corinthians 5:10

Topics: "Aging"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the challenges that people face as they get older and how they can become stagnant in their Christian life. He emphasizes the importance of preaching to older people just as much as to young people. The preacher shares a story of a man over 40 who experienced a miraculous transformation after hearing the call of God. He also mentions a godly woman who prayed for her unbelieving husband for many years, and he eventually accepted Christ at the age of 78. The sermon encourages listeners to never lose hope in the power of God to work miracles, even after the age of 40.

Transcript

I read from this third chapter of Acts, the account and the healing of the lame man. Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man, lame from his mother's womb, was carried, whom they laid daily, at the gate of the temple, which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple.

Who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked them alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have, give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Rise up and walk.

And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up. And immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he, leaping up, stood and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking and leaping and praising God.

This was the red-letter day in the life of this poor man. I am quite certain that he must have started off for the temple that morning, just like any other morning, anticipating the run-of-the-mill humdrum day, just like any other day. But Peter and John showed up, and the power of God came down.

And the man who never had walked, leaped, and changed from monotony to miracle, and from sorrow to shouting. So that in this account you have first tribulation, then you have transformation, then you have testimony, because we read in verse 14, that when accusation was made against Peter and John, that beholding the man which was healed, standing with them, they could say nothing against it. That was the unanswerable argument.

There he stood. But I'm interested tonight in a postscript found in verse 22. For the man was above 40 years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shown.

It's more than passing significance that attaches to this verse. Why would the Holy Spirit go to all the trouble to tell us that the man was over 40 years of age? Well, for one reason, when anything miraculous happens to anybody over 40, it's worth an extra verse. Most people get in a rut by then, and rusted in the groove.

They tell us that life begins at 40, and did in this case. But a great many other things set in, and in the Christian life. Sometimes rigor mortis sets in, along about this time.

This is the day of youth movements all over the land. But I'm concerned tonight with some of the rest of us. We preachers never hesitate to preach to young people when there are plenty of older people in the congregation.

Why should we hesitate to preach to older people if there are young people in the congregation? And you younger folks here tonight, if this has no immediate application to you, all you need is a little time, and you will get into the same category. So we don't hesitate. But we are in great and drastic need today of something miraculous happening to the 40-year-old and over class.

The first half of our lives we are romantic, and the second half we are rheumatic. And of course I've known some rheumatics to become romantic and lose their rheumatism even after 40. But life does not need to flatten out after 40.

The psychology seems to be against a new start. And we have unfortunately taken the attitude, let the young people go forward. We have all that we expect to have from the Lord.

We've arrived. We don't intend to take in much more spiritual territory. And the biggest problem that I'm up against today in meetings in churches over the land is that solid block of folks 40 years old and over who just sit there, set in their ways, looking for young people to do all the going down the aisle and making all the dedications and thank God for the young people.

I don't know what would happen to some of our services if they didn't summon enough energy by the grace of God to make a move. But unless something happens to this older bracket, we are not going to have revival. You know how that when fresh cement is poured, you can make the slightest imprint upon it and it will remain through the years.

But let it harden and an elephant can walk across it and make no impression at all. The Bible speaks of those who are settled on their leaves and have not been emptied from vessel to vessel. People get into

that condition like a jar of milk that is turned to curds or vinegar with a crust on top of it.

And sometimes we get in that condition and we need to be emptied from vessel to vessel. And that's what revival is. Revival is the churning up of the Church of God and particularly, I think, some of the older ones and emptying us from vessel to vessel.

All one needs to do is to check, as I might do tonight if I had time, on how many have been saved before you were 15 and how many from 15 to 25 and then on up and you would instantly see what I mean. The biggest problem in this little journey down here is the middle mile. It's the hardest part of the journey.

There's a certain exhilaration at the beginning and there's a certain thrill at the close. But it's the middle mile that tests the traveler. I grew up in the red dirt country a hundred miles down the road here and I used to have to hoe corn and cotton and we would start out early in the morning and I remember particularly a bottom down by the creek where I did a good deal of rather fancy corn hoeing.

I always stuck the hoe up in the evening so I'd know where I'd stopped the day before and resume my operation. There was no other way of telling which had been hoed and which hadn't been hoed. But I remember that of a morning I started out, although I had a healthy distaste for hoeing corn, I still was a youngster and I'd had a good night's rest without benefit of the sedatives of any sort, whatever, and had had a good breakfast.

And although I didn't care particularly for hoeing corn, there was youthful zest and the beginning of the day wasn't any problem. And then in the evening when the day's work was done and we started back up that long old hill to the house on top, I was weary physically but there was a certain exhilaration about it. But ah, the middle of the day, when we had had our meal and then had to go back to this salt mine as it were, ah, that tested me.

I didn't need any expositor to explain what the burden and heat of the day meant. I understood that full well. Now youth and age have their delights, but when the sunrise glow has disappeared and the sunset has not yet filled the west, that is the test.

My heart goes out to older people. They're the backbone of the church. They carry the financial burden.

And if they're not as starry-eyed as they once were, they've learned some things from experience. And I want to rouse them as I go about from their midday nap, as it were. Somebody has said that youth has fire without light and age has light without fire.

And we need the proper combination of both so that we may be what John the Baptist was, a burning and a shining light. He had both. We shouldn't leave all the fire to youth and we shouldn't leave all the light to age, but combining them, let them shine all together to the glory of God.

The accent's on youth today, I say. You know that full well. But revival, beloved, must come to all ages.

Do you remember the plea that Joel made? The only verse out of Joel that most people know is the one that Peter quoted on the day of Pentecost. But there are some terrific things in this little book. Joel was a revivalist and he called in chapter 2, verse 16, "...gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and those that suck the breast, let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet, let the priests, 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 or use a byword against them.

Wherefore should they say among the people, where is their God?" Now, I submit to you that that was not a youth revival. That was a family revival. God has not committed his program to any age group.

The middle-agers all too often sit in so-called revivals today to watch young people go forward, but there will be no real awakening until the family is moved. The family used to sit together at church. That, of course, is all a thing of the past now.

And some of the oldsters haven't walked down a church aisle since they were in their teens. We need a return to this in this day of split churches and split personalities and split atoms, even the family splits before it ever gets to church. Some never go, and others do nothing about the opportunity after they arrive.

But God's program is not limited to any age group whatsoever. Somebody has said recently that we are suffering today from an epidemic of amateurism. Immaturity is in the saddle.

Revolutionary movements spearheaded by students with more zeal than knowledge, long-known enthusiasm and short-owned experience trouble us these days. And we're seeing the disgusting spectacle of young rock and roll idols making fabulous fortunes for millions of teenage worshippers. Castro in Cuba is an example of such misguided amateurism in government.

Paul Harvey said the other day, with this man and others in mind, when small men make big shadows, the sun has almost set. Rehoboam ruined his kingdom and wrecked his career because he listened to the rash advice of youth and ignored the sober counsel of age. The churches want pastors so young nowadays that a preacher is almost superannuated at 45 years of age.

Somebody said that it's getting like the elder son in the parable of the prodigal son. They're complaining, thou never gavest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends. It's time for preaching on some such text as let him not boast that putteth on his harness as he that taketh it off.

There's no special brand of Christianity for young people. I get a little amused today at these youth churches and youth gospels and youth everything else where you'd think young people had just been invented. But we've had them ever since I can remember.

And all in the world they need to do is what they've always done. They all sin and they need to repent and they need to confess their sins and present their bodies a living sacrifice and put on the Lord Jesus and make not provision for the flesh just like everybody else. There isn't any peculiar brand of Christianity for young people.

We need a family revival in the Church of God today. And we need particularly to be guarded against what Psalm 91 calls the destruction that wasteth at noonday. Now there are many reasons why older people ought to be the first ones to go to the mourner's bench.

Theirs is the responsibility of example for one thing. We've been on the road longer. We ought to be the best Christians in the entire outfit.

But sometimes brand new Christians are better witnesses. You know that. Sometimes the best soul winner is the fellow just fresh out of sin and all aglow with his new experience.

I've often said the happiest fellow in the world is a brand new Christian before he's met too many Bible scholars. He doesn't know any better than to believe it just like it reads, full of zeal and enthusiasm. And then ours is the responsibility of the home, the foundation of our national life.

As goes the home, so goes the nation. And the older people are the head and the heart of the home. They have a solemn charge to keep.

And then ours is the responsibility of money. Of course young people have more money than they used to have. But the older people generally have the larger supply of it and theirs is the responsibility for it.

And then ours is a solemn responsibility of time because we don't have much left. When you don't have much money, you have to spend it very carefully. And when time is running out on you, then you need to be extra careful about husbanding what years or maybe months are left to you.

I used to say now when I'm 20 and when I'm 30 and when I'm 40 and so on, and nowadays I come to with a jerk and realize that I haven't many more decades, if any, to count on. The less of it, the more carefully we ought to spend it buying up its opportunities because the days are evil. And I feel peculiarly that responsibility just now coming as I have to a new lease on life and a new extension of time granted me by the direct intervention of God in response to the prayers of his people.

Only a few months ago I passed through a night when I was closer to the other side, it seemed, than to this one. And the head nurse on that floor, a fine Christian indeed, and she'd worked all day, but she volunteered to set up all night there with me. And I looked out many a time through the night out of that oxygen tent.

And over here she was. And when she wasn't watching me, she was praying. And along about the middle of the night, I said, let's claim the promise.

I couldn't get enough breath together to say much, but she took my hand and we claimed the promise if two of you agree is touching anything. And I have a peculiar responsibility. These days it seems to me because, and you don't have to come through a hospital experience, of course, to have a new lease on life.

Sometimes God grants it in other ways. You do have it anyway. What are you doing about it? When one comes to that day when a note is left but jaded powers to meet the challenge of the hours, as the poet has said, and you don't have all that you once had to battle with, you think of those lines that Amy Carmichael used to quote so much.

What though I stand with the winners or perish with those that fall? Only the cowards are sinners. Fighting the fight is all. Strong is my foe who advances.

Snapped is my blade, O Lord. See their proud banners and lances, but spare me the stub of a sword. Some of us are battling out the rest of our days with only the stub of a sword.

But I, you can do a good job for God with the stub of a sword. And I speak to some here tonight who haven't yet begun to live for God. And you've only the stub of a sword left.

Why don't you turn that over to the Lord? Yes, thank God he can give you a brand new sword in the spirit with which to spend your declining years. It's a solemn and a serious responsibility, beloved. You

remember Paul's wish that he might finish his course with joy.

You're never safe till the last step. Oh, if you're in Christ Jesus, yes, you're safe for time and eternity. But as far as your witness and your testimony and the usefulness of your life, you're never safe till you get clear across.

So many have started out gloriously and they've run well. And then within sight of the goal they have finished miserably. What a fool a man can be after 40 and after 50.

Moses did pretty well the first 40. And it was later in life that he made his big blunder. David as a shepherd boy on the hills of Bethlehem did right well.

But David, a king in a palace, fell miserably. One thinks of Gideon who in the early chapters was a noble warrior for the Lord. But it was after 40, it was in the later chapters that he slipped.

One thinks of King Asa who walked so close to the Lord in the early part of his life and then came to that day when he turned away from the Lord and turned to man. And the last chapter wasn't so good. One thinks of Isaiah, he was marvelously helped till he was strong.

But when he was strong, not when he was weak, when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction. Paul said, I've been faithful to the faith, I've kept the faith. I've been faithful to the fight, I've fought a good fight.

And I've been faithful to the finish, I've finished my course. No wonder he kept his body under. And well, he might have prayed the prayer of the psalmist that I think ought to be put on a big board in every one of our living rooms.

Now also when I am old and gray-headed, O God, forsake me not until I have showed thy strength unto this generation and thy power to every one that is to come. Was it dear Bishop Taylor Smith who prayed, God, keep me from being a wicked old man? It's amazing how one can stumble in the last round of this fight. There's a danger, beloved, of resting on the oars.

We may have mounted up with wings as eagles in youth. We may have run well in middle age, and then we fail to walk, not faint. One of my friends in the North, speaking of a great preacher that most of you would know if I mention him, said, Oh, there was a time in my life when he was my greatest inspiration.

And then there came a time when he was my greatest warning. Isn't that a tragedy, to start out an inspiration and become a warning sign? The sin of middle age is complacency and smugness and lukewarmness and leaving one's first love and getting used to it and it need not be so because the last years can be the best. I heard of two preachers who were talking on Monday and one said to the other, I preached to older people yesterday in Elventure that you can't guess what my text was.

The other said, well, at evening time it shall be light? No. The hoary head is a crown of glory and so on? No. Well, I give up.

He said, what was it? Oh, he said, I preached about the parable of the laborers in the vineyard where the Lord said to the eleventh hour crowd, Go ye also and work in my vineyard. Nobody is exempt. But look at the other half of my text.

The man was over forty years of age on whom the miracle was shown. Miracles after forty. Nobody looks much for miracles after forty.

They don't look for miracles any age these days. Scoffers say all things continue as they were. Everything runs the natural course.

There aren't any miracles. God doesn't break through. And yet the magazines and the books are filled with recipes of success and happiness after middle age and how to stay young and look pretty and be happy and millions try it with, I must confess, poor success.

And that's all because, all because we want a miracle. All kinds of miracles we'd love to have and secure us a few of them. You remember what Gideon said, the land was under a foreign power and here was old Gideon trying to beat out a little grain and all of a sudden an angel appeared.

Now, an angel is a miracle. The appearance of an angel is something that doesn't happen every day in the week. But Gideon was so down in the dumps that he said, If God be for us, why has all this befallen us and where be all the miracles that our fathers told us of? And I tell you, there are people today asking that and yet, my friends, we shouldn't do it because every Sunday morning in church you're right in the middle of a miracle.

When you hold the word of God in your hand, that's a miracle. If you've been born again, that's a miracle. How foolish to sit in a gathering and say, where are the miracles? Of course, a lot of church members have not been converted today.

They don't know what this miracle means. They're not operating on a miracle basis. Nothing has happened to them that couldn't have happened if the Holy Spirit had gone out of business.

And there are some churches operating today that would not know the difference if the Holy Spirit ceased to work. But I thank God that miracles are happening. When John the Baptist had the blues in jail and sent a delegation to Jesus of all men to get low and to ask such a question as this, Art thou he that should come? Or do we look for another? John the Baptist was the last man to ask such a question.

White stood out on the banks of the Jordan and proclaimed it as a glorious affirmation, and now it had become an interrogation. I'm so glad, however, that my Lord didn't bawl him out. The Lord didn't send back a scorching message of reproof and say, I'm ashamed of you.

You ought to know better than that. He knows our frame and remembers that we're dust. And he sent word back and said, Tell him that I'm still in the miracle business.

Tell him that the blind are seeing and the deaf are hearing and the lepers are being cleansed and the poor are having the gospel preached and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me. That's one beatitude we don't know much about. Everybody knows the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount.

This is the one I call the forgotten beatitude. Blessed is he who is not upset by the way I run my business, the Lord says. And we do get upset about it.

And I hear Christians say, Oh, why the world isn't being converted and things aren't working out the way I thought they were. Lord, do we need to start looking for somebody else? And the Lord's saying, No, I'm doing what I started to do. I began it way back there in Luke and I'm still carrying on what I began to do

and teach.

It's the unfinished work. I'm carrying it on. And blessed are you if you don't get upset about it.

Can you claim the beatitude of the unoffended? And then there are others that after 40 settle down after conversion and don't expect another miracle till the resurrection. Now, my friend, you're due several. You're due one a day.

Better than vitamins, you're due many a day. You ought to live one miracle to another. Dear Dr. Ironside used to tell about an old lady that would get up in every testimony meeting and start out 40 years ago.

And he said, I just wanted to say, dear sister, whatever happened to you 40 years ago, thank the Lord for it. But hasn't anything happened since? Now, thank God for that happy day that fixed our choice on him, our Savior and our God. But the path of the justice is a shining light that shines up more and more into the perfect day.

Why, this Christian life is a miracle. It's miraculous in its origin because it's the gift of God. And it's miraculous in its operation by the grace of God.

And it's miraculous in its objective to the glory of God. And there ought to be miracles every day. I don't mean handling rattlesnakes without being poisoned, but I mean miracles of guidance and answered prayer and victory and soul winning.

We don't need to keep scrubbing up this old experience that happened way back there. Every day ought to shine with the presence of God. You can have a miracle after 40 years.

I preached many, many years ago in a little country church near Davids in North Carolina. I was entertained that week in the home of a poor farmer, and I mean poor. And he was really verdant green.

That poor fellow not only didn't know anything, I don't think he even suspected anything. And if he hadn't kept moving, he was so green that I believe if he hadn't kept moving, he'd have taken root and sprouted. I never saw anything like that poor fellow.

And I stayed in his home, and they put me in a little corner room where it wasn't a room. It was just the corner of the house with a kind of a sheet up in front of it to sort of seclude me from the rest of the domain. And in the morning I'd have to look out to make sure that the coast was clear before I could venture out.

And I preached all week, and not a soul moved. I never saw such immobile people in all my life. I began to wonder, why did I ever waste a week on this crowd? Nobody cares whether they ever hear the call of God or not.

But who do you suppose heard the call of God that week? That dear man, over 40, heard the call of God, went back to school, finished school, became a Presbyterian minister. Miracles after 40. If I'd been going all over that community with a fine-toothed comb looking for a prospect, he would have been the last man I would have selected.

But I never despair of the grace of God and the power of my Heavenly Father to work miracles after 40. Sometimes we get rather churlish and set in our ways after 40. Oh, I think of that godly woman who was married to an unbeliever, and she prayed all through the years that he might be saved.

And he showed no signs of interest in spiritual things. But a revival meeting was held in the community, and he fairly astounded her one evening by saying, I think I'll go with you to church. And he went, and God spoke to him, and he got saved.

The next morning as she was preparing breakfast, he said from the other room, I want you to come over here and look out the window. And she came, and although it was a barren winter landscape with not a leaf on the tree, he said, Isn't that the prettiest sight that you ever saw in all your life? He said, It seems like the very trees want to clap their hands. Well, he had scripture for that, because the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Miracles after 40. My last conference before I came here was in Altoona. Pennsylvania.

One afternoon as we rode home from the service, there was a sweet old man in the back seat of the car. He'd been saved when he was 69, and now he was 78. He got in at the last chapter, and as we drove along, my friend in the front seat said to him, Why don't you recite your favorite poem for Brother Hefner? And with rare diction and with a wealth of feeling that I couldn't possibly equal, this dear soul began to quote those amazing lines of Martha Snell Nicholson.

When I stand at the judgment seat of Christ, and he shows me his plan for me, the plan of my life as it might have been, had he had his way, and I see how I blocked him here and I checked him there, and I would not yield my will, will there be grief in my Savior's eyes? Grief, though he loves me still. He would have me rich, and I stand there poor, stripped of all but his grace, while memory runs like a hunted thing down the path I cannot retrace. Then my desolate heart will well and I break with the tears that I cannot shed.

I shall cover my face with my empty hands, I shall bow mine crowned head. Lord of the years that are left to me, I give them to thy hand. Take me and break me and mow me to the pattern thou hast planned.

Well, bless his heart, he got into the kingdom of God at 69, and he had nine years to praise God. Miracles well after 40. I am concerned with dear friends these days who are letting life slip by, and the sands have almost run out, and you don't know for sure that you're a child of God, or you haven't really yet committed all you are and have to him.

And maybe you're saying, well, there's no use. My life is spent. I couldn't be a missionary.

There isn't much. Why, my dear friend, you're the one that ought to be the first one to get down the aisle, because you don't have much time left. If I were here tonight, 75, 80 years of age, and still hadn't yielded my life to the Lord, hadn't been saved, as fast as I could make it, I'd be the first one to go and say, I haven't much left, but if God's been gracious enough to wait on me all this time, certainly the least that I can do is to stand and make a move and say, Dear Lord, I give myself to thee is all that I can do.

And I wouldn't leave you younger folks out either completely on this. God forbid. The best way to keep from getting into such a situation as this is to remember thy creator in the days of thy youth, before the evil days draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no place in them.

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