

That's the Way It Is

by Vance Havner

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the times and knowing what to do, and the need for prophets in today's world to guide us in this understanding.

Duration: 29:29

Scripture: 1 Chronicles 12:32, Luke 21:28, Romans 13:11-14, James 1:5

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the need for something powerful to happen in church. He compares it to divine electricity, stating that when we attend church, we should either receive a spiritual charge or a wake-up call. The preacher highlights the importance of being conscious and engaged during worship, rather than singing without understanding the words. He then references Romans 13:11-12, which urges believers to wake up from spiritual slumber and put on the armor of light. The sermon concludes with the preacher discussing the futility of trying to bring about a perfect world through human efforts, and the hope of Christ's return to establish His kingdom.

Transcript

It is good to be with you here. The first time I ever came to Charlotte to preach was in 1915. That sounds a little prehistoric, I'm sure.

But there was such a year. And I was in circulation. And I came down from Catawba County where I grew up and spoke in the old Broadway theater in the courthouse.

I've been coming back to Charlotte through the years since. And I have been on the road alone in this type of ministry for 38 years. We old folks, the senior citizens, have to work out a philosophy of our own.

I'm not as old as you might think. I went to see my father-in-law about a year ago. He was 98.

And I said to him, Papa, how does it feel to be old? He said, well, you ought to know. But I heard of an old timer in his 80s who was getting ready to make a trip around the world. And one of his friends went over to the airport and said, I'll declare you yourself and try this.

Why? I may never see you again. No, he said, you may be dead when I get back. I owe a great deal to Presbyterians.

The first great evangelist that I ever heard was Dr. Wilbur Chapman, right here in Charlotte. And Charles M. Alexander led the singing. And at the piano was Harry Barraclough who wrote Ivory Palaces.

It's been a long time. Then later on when I became a little liberal in some of my theology and God shut up the doors and I had to start over, God used Gresham Mason's book, Christianity and Liberalism, to advance some absolutely unanswerable arguments of the right sort. And then Donald Gray Barnhouse, was a great friend who helped open the doors of Bible conference work with his great ministry.

What a teacher. I am not a Bible teacher, I want to say that at the beginning. I am not a pastor or a teacher or an evangelist.

Sometimes I wonder what I am. I've not made up my mind fully, and you may have a new word for it afterward, but don't tell me, maybe I wouldn't want to hear it. But I am of the conviction that we need today, in addition to pastors, teachers and evangelists, and I thank God for every one of them, we need prophets, New Testament prophets.

Not in the predictive sense, the old definition is good, not a foreteller but a foreteller, speaking for God both to the nation and to the church. I have aspired through these years to follow something of that ministry, but I don't like the word prophet generally, because it's all right in the book, but prophet today connotes to the average individual, some rather queer looking individual wearing a long robe, carrying a walking stick and wearing sandals and all the rest of it, and I don't qualify for that kind of a description. But we do need prophets in this day and hour, and the business of a prophet is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.

And I try to do a little of both, by the grace of God. The scripture this morning is very familiar from Romans 13 and very practical, beginning with verse 11. It's all the answers and tells us where we are and what to do about it.

And that knowing the time or the season that now it 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. 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, but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the positive. And then in spite of these folks who say they don't believe in negative preaching, the Bible's got a lot of negatives in it, make not for thee, for the flesh, to fulfill the love thereof.

We read in 1 Chronicles 12.32 about the children of Issachar who had understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do. I wish we had more of that tribe now. Not just knowledge.

There are plenty of people who know a lot about the times, but they don't know what to do in them. Will Durant knows a lot about the times, indeed. Arnold Toynbee, but apparently they didn't know much about what to do in them.

Somebody has said if you want knowledge, go to school. If you want wisdom, get on your knees. If any of you like wisdom, let him ask of God.

That's where it comes from. And wisdom is the proper use of knowledge. We listen to the news analysts and the columnists, and they dazzle us sometimes.

We listen to the panel discussions and the symposiums. You know what a symposium is. It's where we prove our ignorance.

We listen to the symposium, and we've about decided that they know precious little about what to do. I don't know of anything that will wear me out more quickly than listening to a bunch of experts on television analyzing the situation. I read the other day about something that I don't think happened, but makes a good illustration anyhow.

A man was in the hospital for a brain operation, and they had his brain over in another room working on it. I'm telling it the way I heard it, you understand. And they say that he got up and put on his clothes and left.

They didn't find him for five years. When they did, he was an expert in Washington. I don't have a bit of trouble believing that.

Not a bit. You know as well as I do, you turn off the TV and you don't know any more than you did about what to do about what. And we're not going to get out of the woods by following blind leaders of the blind, and what is worse, bland leaders of the bland.

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. Well, he ought to come any time then, because we have succeeded at that. I'll buy that statement, because Paul Harvey has read his Bible.

The Bible tells us ye do err. Why? For two reasons. Not knowing.

That's ignorance. Not knowing. Not knowing two things.

The Scripture and the power of God. That's the basis of all error. Ignorance.

And so much of it is educated ignorance. The natural man receives lots of things of the Spirit of God. They are moronic.

They are foolishness to him. Because they have to be spiritually discerned. A PhD degree will help you after you are saved in some of your study and so on, but it won't make spiritual things any clearer before you are born again.

The natural man just can't take it in. And if a PhD is all he has, that just means phenomenal dead. Because you don't have the ability to ascertain truth until the Spirit of God has set you.

You may know history, but you don't know His story, as it has been put. And there's something about the way God operates in His history, within history, that charms me very much. There's almost a touch of humor in it.

For instance, in Luke 2, I read, and this verse starts off rather pompously with big names, and it says, And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. And this taxing was first made when Serenus was governor of Syria, and all went to be taxed, everyone to his own city. Sounds rather pompous for a beginning, but look what comes next.

And here's where God's moving now in the next verse. And Joseph also went up from Galilee to be taxed, with Mary, his espoused wife. If you had seen that little peasant couple going along, you wouldn't have given them a second look.

But that's where God was moving. And He does it that way. And there's another one that's even more pompous, over in chapter 3 of Luke.

Now you talk about a lot of big shots. Listen to this. Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, Caesar punctus Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Icaria, and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, and Caiaphas being the high priest.

My, what a who's who. But look what comes next. The word of God came unto John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness.

That's where God was moving. All these individuals were just winded wreckers for John the Baptist out in the wilderness. Now the children of Issachar not only had understanding of the times, but it produced knowledge of what Israel and the application is, God's people, ought to do.

I think, beloved, there are four considerations that ought to be kept in mind if we are to know what to do. There is, first of all, the promise of our Lord's return, that divine event toward which the whole creation moves. The church, the professing church, missed the road a long time ago, and she quit looking for the king to come back, started building the kingdom down here in her own way.

It's a spiritual kingdom. It's not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. And the first word is righteousness.

And people don't like righteousness. They don't want to hear about righteousness. They want peace and joy.

They'll buy books by the dozen about peace of heart and peace of mind and so on. You know, Rabbi Liebman and Norman Vincent Peale and Hodin Sheen have all written about peace of mind. And I heard about it, dear lady, when in the bookstore the other day and said, Have you got that book, A Peace of My Mind, by Rabbi Norman Vincent Sheen? Well, she was a little confused.

But there is going to be a visible kingdom, thank God, not brought in by education, legislation, sanitation, and reformation under religious austerity. The Chinese have a proverb, You cannot carve rotten wood. And that's why you can't make anything out of unregenerate human nature.

That's why you can't get the world together. That's why the Brotherhood of Man's a joke. That's why it won't work.

Oh, Will Rogers, when the first disarmament conference was being held in London, you smile now when you think about that, when we're in the biggest race ever right now. Will said, Those fellows might get somewhere if it wasn't for human nature. Now, when you boil that down, that's a tremendous thing.

I wish he were living today. I'd like to know what he'd say about some things going on now. If we understand that the kingdom is not to be set up till the king gets back, the visible kingdom, some misguided souls wouldn't be riding queer bandwagons headed for some counterfeit millennium.

You've read about Rip Van Winkle, who took a long nap, and when he woke up, when he went to sleep, George III was the ruler of America, and when he woke up, George Washington was president of the United States. That's a long nap. And Rip Van Winkle didn't know about the change, and he started

hollering for the king.

He was hollering for the wrong George. And a lot of people are hollering for the wrong George today because we don't know that the real king is coming. I had a great old preacher on the West Coast who preached the return of the Lord the way the Bible teaches.

Didn't have some seminary students there, didn't like it much. They decided they'd go up to him and make a feeble note of protest. One of them said, Dr. Henson, we just can't get this out of the Bible the way you've been preaching.

He said, of course you can't get it out. It's in there to stay. And it is.

The early church lived proclaiming Christ's come, and they lived with the prospect of Christ's coming, and they lived in the power of Christ's contemporary. I don't know what to think about some of my brethren today. I think some of them are saved and going to heaven, but they never seem to get excited about the possibility of the Lord coming back any time.

I think of old W.B. Riley of Minneapolis, a great old champion of the truth a generation ago. He had a friend, a Methodist bishop, and they were close friends, but their eschatology was miles apart. They always got in an argument about prophecy.

And then there came some months of separation, and the bishop was off on a trip, and when he came back he said, Well, Riley, Jesus hasn't come yet. And Riley said, No, and for your benefit, bishop, I'm glad he hasn't. We might feel that way about it indeed.

There is not only the prospect of the Lord's return, there is in the second place the possibility of revival. I didn't say probability. There's a lot of confusion today about revival.

Some people say that we'll never have another one, and some don't know what a revival is and wouldn't know one if it came. And some are saying we're having one, but it's a false revival, and I agree in part with that. Synthetic revival can look so real that it's difficult to separate the wheat from the tares.

I don't hear many people praying for one of the gifts of the Spirit today. I hear a lot about some of the others, but I don't hear much about discernment, the discerning of spirits. And if we had more discernment today in the church, we wouldn't be in such a mess about some of these other matters.

If general revival comes, it won't come with expos and expos and extravaganza. The Welsh revival came God's way. They didn't even have a choir.

They didn't have songbooks. They didn't have a preacher a lot of the time. They had no publicity, but they did have God.

And I wonder what would happen today if we'd get tired of all our little plans, tax the queue and banana bunches and pin the tail on the donkey and karate experts and theatrical celebrities and just let God come in and take over for a change. We might see one again. It'll never be worked out by big names and committee meetings and high-pressure promotion.

The wind blow us where it lifts us, where it pleases, where it won't please, and he is sovereign. You cannot program Pentecost. Then in the third place, if our Lord carries and if there's no revival, there's the prospect of retribution.

And I think that Ruth Graham was absolutely right years ago when she said as she looked at some of the formidable statistics that Billy had compiled about our moral condition that if God doesn't send judgment on America, you'll have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah. And I believe that with all my heart. I don't say today that civilization is going to the dogs.

I've got too much respect for dogs. I wouldn't want to insult the canine kingdom with any such remarks as that. Heard of a motel the other day that put up a sign just in time, you know they're not supposed to allow dogs, and they said we've changed their minds.

Said after all, no dog ever set the place on fire smoking a cigarette here. No dog ever got drunk here. No dog ever left without paying his bill.

They will take dogs. And then underneath had this note to us folks that if you can get your dog to vouch for you, we'll let you come and stay here. It's a rough day when you've got to get your dog to vouch for you.

I have no apologies for such a view of civilization. I agree with the one time Prince of Wales who was asked what he thought about civilization. He said, I think it's a good idea.

Why doesn't somebody start it? And I feel that way about this boasted progress which is the biggest joke that I know anything about today. America is at Belshazzar's Feast, and that feast was characterized by revelry, revelation, and retribution. And that's what we're having today.

God's writing on the wall. And the soothsayers and the smoothsayers cannot decipher the heavenly hieroglyphics. But thank God they had one man around there who knew how to read the writings.

Daniel was not at that orgy, mind you. Have you noticed they had to send for him? They hadn't given him a complimentary ticket to come and sip ginger ale with all the alcoholics. The preacher who stays where he belongs will have his big chance when God starts writing on the wall.

This is no day for pulpit pollyannas and politicians and promoters and performers viewing the world with rose-colored glasses and painting the clouds with sunshine and dusting off sin with a powder puff and spreading cold cream on cancers. This is no time. There never has been a time for such preaching.

Against the background of the Lord's return, revival, or retribution, there's one other consideration. And that's what I would call the program of the remnant. God has always had his 7,000 who have not bowed beneath the veil, the church within the church, the Gideon's band, the master's minority, the company of the committed, the assembly of the anyones over there in Revelation.

My Lord told Leah to see her to repent, and they didn't repent. But he said, I've got one more proposition. If anyone, I'll start with one man.

Campbell Morgan said he excommunicated the whole church and started over with one man. And I believe that's what God's doing today. I believe that underneath all our huge programs and all our religious activity, among all denominations, it makes no difference.

There's a great undercurrent and a moving of God among us. And they know what God's people ought to do. Chosen people in the Old Testament, told people in the New Testament.

Well, what ought we to do? Let's be practical about it. Romans tells us in the passage I read, the night is far spent, the day is at hand, we're told. Thank God doesn't say the day is far spent and the night is at

hand.

For a Christian, good news is bad news and bad news is good news. When they shall say peace and safety, well, that sounds like good news. Sudden destruction is coming.

And then when you read about men's hearts failing in prayer and fear and wars and rumors of wars, that's bad news. But what does it say? It doesn't say drop your head. It says lift up your head, because your redemption draweth nigh.

It's just the other way around about as a Christian. And we ought to wake up, we read, therefore, here. Awake! Salvation's nearer than we believe.

We have anarchy in the world, we have apostasy in the professing church, and we have apathy in the true church. And that's the situation. I'm glad to be in a place here this morning where something's going on.

I declare I get an old kind over the country. And I can appreciate that kid at church one morning that, well, the preacher was through, but he wouldn't quit. You know what I mean.

And he'd looked through the songbook and had drawn all the pictures he could draw, and still the preacher droned on. And so the youngster finally said, Mama, what's that flag up there? Well, that's the American flag, son. You know what that is.

Well, what's that on the other side of the pulpit? That's the Christian flag. And what's that little one with all the stars in it? That's for those who have died in the service. He said, the morning service or the evening service.

I don't want to get in trouble. I like to be in one where you're alive. Thank the Lord.

Old Clovis Chapel, that great old Methodist preacher went to one of these meetings where they didn't have real stimulation, so some dear song leader, you know, was trying to create it. Shake hands with five people this way and all that sort of thing. Old Clovis Chapel said, you might as well try to boil water over the picture of a glow worm.

I heartily agree with it. I got in one of those some time ago. We had a young fellow up in New England somewhere, and bless his heart, he was doing his best.

He was singing There's Power in the Blood. Well, I've heard him put four powers in it, but he worked up to six, and then he got eight in there. You could have shut your eyes and thought you were listening to gun smoke.

Now, something ought to happen in church. It ought to happen, and I like to go where something is happening. We're dealing with divine electricity, and we ought to get either a charge or a shock when we go to church.

If you get a blessing, you will go out charged. If you don't like it, you may go out shocked. You may even go out mad, but anything's better than nothing.

It's this crowd that just goes out that bothers me so much today. In vain we sing our formal songs. In vain we strive to rise.

Hosannas languish on our tongues, and our devotion dies. Most people are unconscious when they're singing. I don't know what they're singing.

If they'd stop in the middle of a verse and be honest about it, they'd choke up before they ever got through the rest of the line. We're not aware of it. What does it say? Wake up.

Our salvation's near. Sometimes I wonder whether we believe that where we meet in Jesus' name, that he's really there. I'd like to get in a meeting one time before I die where everybody believes that for a change.

Tonight, I think I'm going to talk about that statement, where two or three have got it in my name, and my subject is, look who's here. Now, I don't mean me, and I don't mean you. I mean, has it ever gotten through your thinking that we are to be privileged tonight, as we are this morning, with the personal presence of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit? We've heard it too much, we Americans.

Maybe if we'd heard it for the first time, we wouldn't get over it all day and all week and all month. I feel like going down the aisle sometimes shaking everybody and saying, do you believe it? Do you believe Jesus is coming back? Could be today. Do you believe he's going to put the devil out of business? That he's going to restore law and order, and the lion and the lamb are going to lie down together and he ain't going to study war no more.

Lovers are going to be raised in their new Easter outfits. You have a brand new body. Jesus shall reign wherever the sun that his successive journeys run.

For now is our salvation. Do you believe it? And they say, well, yes. Why don't you come too? Because it says here, not only wake up, it says look up.

And I would add another one. Get up. You know, sometimes you wake up if you don't get up and go back to sleep and sleep more soundly than you ever did before.

I've been in some revivals where the church did that. They woke up that week and made a lot of resolutions and promises, but they really didn't get up and get down to business. Jesus said in the garden, Arise, let us be gone.

Not enough to wake up and let's get going here. So let's carry it through in all its glorious potential and possibility. Revival is not just an awakening, it's an arising.

And then it says in verse 12, that double-barreled positive-negative verse, Put on the Lord Jesus. Some church members remind me of a man trying to wear two suits of clothes at the same time. Put on the Lord Jesus.

Put off and put on. Put off and put on. That's the note through here.

Don't just ask God to take away your sins. He will, but you must put them away. He says, Forsaketh his sins, shall have mercy.

There are many people willing for God to take them away, but are you willing to put them away? Put off the old man. Put on the new man. Put away lying.

Put off anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy talk. When you're saved, you're a new creature. Old things have passed away.

You live in the new man. Feed him. And exercise him.

And he'll grow stronger. Christ lives in you. You've got a double responsibility.

Put on the Lord Jesus. Make not provisions for the flesh. I heard of a boy whose daddy told him not to go in swimming that day, and he went in anyhow.

And his father told him. And the boy said, Well, I didn't mean to go in. Father said, Well, why do you have your bathing suit with you? Well, he said, I brought that along in case I was tempted.

A lot of people make arrangements to sin. Don't make arrangements to sin. That TV program that's not fit to look at.

Unholy thoughts. You can't help bad folks coming along any more than you can help running into disease, gentlemen. But you don't have to open the door and say, Come in and make yourself at home.

Oh, I think of Jim Elliot who died down in Ecuador. Red-blooded young fellow. Just before he left the state, they said a friend took me over to his home to look at television, and I was convicted by Psalm 119.37. Keep thou mine eyes from beholding vanity.

Now, that's not some old mystic token. That's a red-blooded young fellow who got convicted. He was exposing himself.

He was making it easier to sin. Make new arrangements for that. That's Joan, the tribe of Ithaca.

Now, against all this background, God grants that you may join the remnant. Because one of these days, the Lord is going to check on our stewardship. I heard of a fellow on trial, and the judge said, You're allowed a lawyer.

Now, you can have a lawyer, and there's a lawyer over here to the right, and a lawyer over there to the left. And there's another one outside. He's out here in the hole.

So he looked right, and he looked left, and he said to the judge, I think I'll take a chance on the one out in the hole. Well, I know something better than that. My friend, this morning, I'm not worrying too much about the right and the left.

I'm concerned about the up and the down, the above and the below. That's what concerns me today. This right wing, do you belong to the right wing or the left wing? One of our great black preachers said the trouble with that is they're both flapping on the same old bird.

And that's why I don't have much confidence. Finally, let me say this, or else I'm going to be as long as that preacher I told you about a while ago with the kid drawing pictures in the songbook. Every time, a preacher friend of mine said to me, every time I hear Walter Cronkite, he ends up by saying, and that's the way it is.

I feel like saying, no, Walter, that's not the way it is. That's just the way it looks. And that's right.

You know, sometimes when I, I do a lot of walking. I'm a walking preacher. I find myself quoting again and again the wonderful lines of James Russell, Lord.

Careless seems the great avenger. Sometimes it looks like God doesn't care. Lord, where are you? Why don't you come back and untangle this mess? Careless seems the great avenger.

History's pages but record one death grapple in the darkness, twixt old systems and the word. Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne. That's the way it is.

But that's not the way it is because the rest of that line says, but that scaffold sways the future. And behind the dim unknown standeth God within the shadows keeping watch above his own. My friend, that's the way it is in his time.

So don't let the way it seems keep you from seeing it the way it is. And pray that God may grant you wisdom and not just knowledge to understand what you hope to do.

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