

The Situation Is Desperate

by Vance Havner

The sermon emphasizes the need for holy desperation, where we humble ourselves, seek God's face, and turn from our wicked ways, in order to experience His intervention and blessings in our lives.

Duration: 32:30

Scripture: Lamentations 5:19, Micah 7:2

Topics: "Revival"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of holy desperation and how it is reflected in the book of Lamentations and Micah. He emphasizes the desperate state of the world, where there is meanness and darkness at work. The preacher highlights the need for desperate prayer as the only weapon left for the saints. He also criticizes the lack of fervent prayer in churches, particularly during New Year's Eve celebrations, where prayer is often rushed and not given enough importance.

Transcript

In the 30th chapter, King Jehoshaphat of Judah was facing a national emergency. The armies of Ammon and Moab were marching against him, and the situation looked hopeless. In desperation, he called the nation to prayer and called on God to intervene.

And in the 12th verse, he said, He admits that he is unable to cope with the crisis. Today is God's opportunity. It was then, and it is now.

We need a Jehoshaphat in Washington today as never before. We've had calls to prayer, but most of them don't do any good, because just setting a day of prayer for everybody to turn out and do nothing but pray may miss the mark or a thousand miles, because unless we humble ourselves and seek God's face and turn from our wicked ways, when we pray, he won't hear it anyway. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.

I've been in a lot of prayer meetings where a waste of time, because they didn't meet the conditions of concession, repentance. America has reached desperation. The situation is desperate, but we're not, and that's the trouble.

We still think we can handle it. The experts are sure they have the answer, and they don't even know what the question is. Politicians have their panaceas, and you see how well they're handling it.

I heard of a fellow who went to a hospital for brain operation. This didn't happen, I'm sure, but it makes a good illustration anyway. And so they were operating on his brain.

They had it over in another room working on it. And he was lying there. I'm telling it like I heard it.

And the story goes that he came to and got up and put on his clothes and left, and they didn't find him for three years. When they did, he was an expert in Washington. I don't have a bit of trouble believing that.

Who do you think is going to get up in Congress and say, We don't know what to do? They don't, but who's going to say it? Jesus said before he comes back it will be a time of perplexity. We will have lost our way, that's what the word means. And we'll be too proud to admit it.

And we think that all our reforms in education and technology and American know-how will pull us through. We've tried everything, nothing works. When are we going to quit kidding ourselves? Anybody can see that all the new ideas are not doing the job.

We have a creeping socialism. Winston Churchill said there are only two places where socialism will work, in heaven where they don't need it and in hell where they already have it. You've never heard more talk about sex than you have in the last few years.

I don't preach about it because every time I hear a preacher who likes to preach a lot about it, I get a little uneasy about him. I think if we'd shut up maybe for a year or two, the situation might improve. The operation's brilliant, but the patient's died, and that doesn't speak well for the surgeons.

The best thing the president could say would be, We don't know what to do, but our eyes are on God. It wouldn't hurt him, any president. Everybody knows you don't know what to do anyway.

An honest confession would be good for the soul, even if it is hard on the reputation. We're faced by a combination of forces, beloved, that can be met only by the intervention of God. But as long as we have a few tricks up our sleeves, God will not touch us.

He'll leave us to our own devices. God never saves anybody. He was trying to save himself.

That's why some people never get saved. When they get to the place that they give up, God will move in. Sometimes a lifeguard has to knock out a drowning man in order to rescue him, lest in his desperation he hold on so tightly that some of them would go down.

Now, God waits until we quit kicking. Jehoshaphat here had quit kicking. The Bible's full of what I like to call holy desperation.

Jeremiah said in Lamentations 5, Remember, O Lord, what is come upon us, considering, behold, our reproach. Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens. We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows.

Eighteen verses of that. And then out of all that desperation, he says, Thou, O Lord, remainest forever, thy throne from generation to generation. That's holy desperation.

Or, I turn to the book of Micah. This reads like the morning paper. The good man is perished out of the earth.

There is none upright among men. They all lie in wait for blood. They hunt every man his brother with a net, that they may do evil with both hands earnestly.

The prince asketh and the judge asketh for a reward, and the great many other of his mischievous desires. So they wrap it up. They're all in collusion.

Micah said, Don't trust in a friend. Don't put confidence in a guide. He said, You can't even trust your wife.

Keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom. And then the verse that Jesus quoted, For the son dishonoreth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and men's enemies are the men of his own house. That's a pretty bad situation.

I'm not surprised that the next verse says, It's about time. Now, we're exactly in that kind of situation now, but we're not looking to the Lord. We're looking to men and to our own devices.

I'm tired of hearing the experts tell us what we need to do to improve the environment. Somebody said, When you're up to your ears in crocodiles, there's no time to discuss how to drain the swamp. That's where we are now.

We've got crocodiles. We haven't got time to drain the swamp. The Church needs to pray the prayer of Jehoshaphat.

The Church has never faced such a demonic combination of enemies as today. We think we're rich and creased with goods and don't need anything. And we don't know how wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked we are.

I like the way Phillips translates the last part of Ephesians 6.12. We're up against the unseen power that controls this dark world and spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil. We've always had meanness. What we're reading today and seeing is not ordinary meanness.

This is demonism. This is double-distilled powers of darkness at work. The invasion of another world.

The situation is desperate. But the saints are not. I don't think we have but one weapon left, and we don't use it.

And that's desperate prayer. I hear very little desperate prayer. I get amused at the way we celebrate New Year's Eve in most of the churches.

Get together and, well, we have to eat first, of course. I've always read about poor as a church mouse. I don't know if anything getting any fatter than a church mouse is these days.

Then after we eat, we have a movie and play a few games. Learn about quarter to twelve, decide to pray a little. Can't think of enough to pray about for any longer than fifteen minutes and almost run out then.

Why do we resort to everything else on the face of the earth? I marvel that churches don't fill up these days with penitent church members praying all night if necessary while there's time. The sinners revel all night while there's time. I'd hate to know how many of the church members set up for the late, late, late, late show feasting on the filth of Sodom and Gomorrah brought into the living room.

I know of a church that has a glass front. You walk down the street and see what's going on on the inside. There ain't no time for a glass front, I said.

There's not enough going on. They ought to wall up the place till something happens. What would happen, do you think, if the lights burned late in our churches around over this area and pastors by would say, what's going on here? And somebody said, we're praying.

What about? Well, wouldn't you know? Haven't you read the papers and don't you know what's going on? We thought it was serious enough to pray about. I think any old sinner would decide if it's getting that bad, maybe I ought to give it a second thought. I often think in my hometown of Greensboro, about 150,000 people there, what would happen if the Christians, regardless of denomination, would sometimes get so bothered about the fix we're in that we'd fill the Coliseum automatically without it being worked up.

I don't mean one of these worked up prayer meetings organized by a committee. That'd kill it to begin with. Committee is a group of the unfit appointed by the unwilling to do the unnecessary.

I mean a sure enough prayer meeting where they just got together because they were desperate. Well, I'd like to see one of them, not one of these little affairs with the mayor making a speech and all that sort of business. I mean holy desperation.

We're proceeding on a business as usual basis these days. But beloved, nothing is as usual and never will be again. We've taken down a road and we're not coming back.

And I believe the emergency requires urgency. If somebody's very ill in your home, you change the schedule of the household. You don't do as you normally do because there's an emergency.

When disaster strikes, tornado, flood, hurricane, business closes down, the inhabitants may have to leave town, the military may have to take over, there's an emergency and there's urgency. The ambulance and the fire truck drive right through the traffic signals and the speed limits because there's an emergency. And if your house were on fire and I came down the street and you were asleep up in your room, I would be justified in tearing the door down if I could to get in and advise you of your emergency.

You wouldn't expect me to act as usual. You wouldn't expect me to come in and say, pardon me, but there seems to be a slight conflagration in the neighborhood and I'd advise you to remove your carcass from this detainment. You'd expect me to say, get out of here! The house is on fire! Of course, I know some people get panicky in a fire and throw the clock out the window and carry feather pillows downstairs and do all kinds of silly things.

And God's people sometimes get excited the wrong way. But I believe it's about time we took this thing seriously. I never see most of the members of any church I visit during a revival.

They don't think they're worth going to. We have a lot of visitors, sometimes 50, 60. Had people drive 100 miles, they did last night, some of them.

And folks right across the street, church members never come over here. They couldn't care less. Now, that doesn't bother me personally.

I've reached the age where I'm not trying to project an image and build up a reputation. I'm not trying to pack the house. It's the business of the church members to fill the house, the business of the preacher to

fill the pulpit.

So I try to tend to my part of the deal. I know a lot of people not interested in their sermon tasters. They go one night to hear the new preacher and then I don't know where they are the next night trying out another one.

Well, you never get anywhere with that kind of a crowd. I'm after folks that mean business, what few we have left today. If we don't believe what we believe, if we believed it, I don't think any church ought to throw them over the crowd.

We don't believe it. I don't think most of us believe it. I don't think we believe God is there.

Old Jonathan Goforth went to a church on prayer meeting night. The crowd was slim and the preacher said, Oh, why don't people go to prayer meetings? Old Jonathan Goforth said they don't believe God. If they believed God was here and they loved God, they'd be here.

You have to have some famous name. During the Welsh Revival, Evan Roberts was the man that God used mightily and one night they had a great crowd waiting for Evan Roberts. They thought the revival couldn't start until Evan Roberts got there.

It didn't seem to occur to them that God was around somewhere. And Evan Roberts finally got there and walked out and said, Do you believe the Bible? Amen. Do you believe the promise where two or three are gathered in my name? Amen.

Do you believe God's here? Yes. Well, he said, You don't need me then. Put on his hat and coat and left.

Now that was a dramatic way of driving home something that they needed to be jarred loose long enough to realize they were looking for Evan Roberts, not for God. He was already there. If we don't believe what we say we believe, we're the worst hypocrites on earth to preach and promote something that most of its adherents wouldn't miss if they lost it.

If the average church member lost his religion, he'd hardly miss it. There's something wrong with our Christianity. When you have to beg most of our crowds to come to church to hear about it.

I'm ashamed of the world going by looking at a corporal's guard huddled in a lumberyard, empty benches, saying, Revive us again. If I were a non-Christian, I'd feel like saying, What do you mean? Trying to recruit new volunteers for the army of the Lord when most of the outfit's already gone AWOL. Either Christianity is not what it's supposed to be or we've been sold a cheap brand and inoculated with the moral forms or we've been immunized against the real thing.

I believe that any other organization that didn't take any more joy in its program and used as much raw material and turned out as poor a finished product as the average church would be out of business. I'm embarrassed. Joy was in the Old Testament.

He said, I'm tired of that. He's even going by saying, Where's your God? Where's the God of Abraham? I'm embarrassed when the world goes by and looks on our feeble ceremony swapping a few members from one church to another, just moving corpses from one mortician to another, preaching a dynamite gospel and living firecracker lives. Well, to face it, I can't accept it as normal.

I could take it a lot easier. But the prophets didn't accept the religion of their day as normal. Our Lord didn't accept the conditions in the churches of Asia as normal.

Paul didn't accept conditions in Corinth as normal. He could have said, Well, I know that we've got one man living with the wrong woman. And I know we've got disorder in the church and in court and at the Lord's table and so on.

But we've got a lot of good people here. And I want us to look at the bright side. So I'm not going to say anything about it.

That's what we do. But that's not what he did. Campbell Morgan says the first half of 1 Corinthians deals with the carnalities in the church and the last half with the spiritual.

They say today, Don't talk about what's wrong. Don't talk about it. That's the new advice for preachers.

Paul didn't go by that. Then I hear all this talk, Just preach love. And if you preach love, that'll take care of everything.

I've never seen so much love in all my life today in all these psychedelic colors all over the country. Love, love, love. We're just about to get love today.

Today. Well, if love will do it, why didn't Paul begin with the 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians? Why did he wait till he got half through the book and more before he ever got around to it? There was too much wrong. He wasn't about to dodge that.

I couldn't be sitting in a rocking chair drawing my Social Security and going out occasionally and taking it easy. I'm working harder in the 70s than I ever did in the 50s. Got more to do.

Because I can't take it easy. And any preacher who does is not worth the salt in his bread. I don't have to preach this hard, this much.

But somebody has to overdo it for those who underdo it. And I started out preaching like this. The devil said if I preach this way, I couldn't make it.

He said, you'll starve to death. And from the way I look, you may think the devil is right. But I'm doing all right.

I'm doing all right. Because I can't take it easy. And I do believe, beloved, that we need to get on an emergency basis and quit whistling our way past the graveyard.

Have you noticed that through the Bible the people who got the greatest blessing from God were every one of them desperate people? Jacob at Jabbok, Moses at the Red Sea, Gideon in the 300, David and Goliath, the four lepers in the gate of Samaria, Bartimaeus, Lachias, the Syrophenician woman, and the woman and the judge in the parable, and the man who had company at midnight and no bread. Every one desperate. I'll tell you one who wasn't desperate, and he didn't get his.

He was the rich young ruler. And you'd have thought he was the best prospect who had come along. But he could take it or leave it.

As long as you can take it or leave it, you'll leave it every time. But I love to think about that woman in Mark 5, that poor sick soul that had spent all her money, was about to die. And she got up one morning, a dismal morning just like all the others, and there wouldn't be many more from the way she felt.

And she heard a big noise. She looked out and people were running all over the streets, all headed in one direction. She asked, what's wrong? And they said, Jesus is Nazareth, going through town.

And she said, Dad, this is my only chance. She got an old rag of a dress from somewhere and put it on and got out in the crowd and got through it. I don't know how, I remember she was nearly dead.

But when you're desperate, you'll do what you can't do. And she got through. And Mark tells it.

And it says, when she heard of Jesus, came in the press and touched his garment. For she said, if I may touch with his clothes, I shall be whole. Now there's another word that shows up in that account.

Throng, many people thronged him. She said, if I can just touch him. And she did.

And Jesus, knowing that virtue had gone out of him, turned him in the crowd and said, who touched my clothes? You have both words in the next verse. His disciples said, thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, who touched me? And Peter said, one of the Gospels tells it, said, Lord, why would you ask who touched me? With all this crowd pushing and shoving. Poor old Peter.

Always said it wrong. Everything he said in the New Testament was a mistake. I mean, in the Gospels, it was a mistake.

Somebody said he was the most American of all the disciples. The Bible said he said not knowing what he said. That's pretty descriptive.

But Jesus knew the difference between thronging and touching. He said, I felt power go out. And I often look over the crowd and wonder how many in the crowd were touching him.

Especially on Sunday morning, they're all thronging. And I wonder who will touch him. Because that's different.

But you're not going to touch him if you're not desperate. I just noticed that old song a while ago. I think when I read that sweet story of, oh, when Jesus is here among men, how he called little children as lambs to his fold, I should like to have been with them then.

Well, that would be nice. But you don't have to go back 2,000 years and cross the ocean 3,000 miles. People say, oh, if Jesus were just here today, it would be simple.

I wouldn't mind it. I could touch him, too. Now, let me tell you something.

He is here. He's here right now. He's right in this place.

Because he said, with two or three gathering in my name, I'm there. If we could ever wake up to that and believe it, I don't know when we'd ever get out of church. But we've heard it too much.

We've got used to it. Doesn't move us. But if you get desperate, you may do something about it.

So I keep wondering, have we got any desperate people in the congregation? I'd like to know tonight. I don't mean you or just everybody that needs Jesus. We all need Jesus.

I mean somebody with a special, deep, desperate need of the Lord for yourself or for somebody else. If you've got it, you know it. Now, if you have to think it up, forget it.

You haven't got it. But if you've got a desperate need, nobody will ever tell you about it. Nobody had to tell this woman, Jesus, going through town, do you need anything? My soul.

She was just one lump of human need. And I don't have to bother with folks that are desperate. Beg them.

If you're desperate tonight, and my soul, a lot of people ought to be. When you take the overall situation, everybody ought to be. And yet I get bothered about how smug and rather content our crowds are.

Not much upset about anything. I don't mean frantic. But I mean burdened and concerned.

Have you got a desperate need of Jesus tonight? For yourself or for somebody else? Shall we bow our heads in prayer? I'm going to ask just one little simple request. I'm not going to make it long because I'd contradict myself. If you have a desperate need of Jesus tonight, for body, mind, or spirit, for yourself or for somebody or something else, would you just lift your hand right now? Yes.

Why? Thank you. Why, they're up all over the place. Now, Lord, we sow the hands, but you sow the hearts.

Now, Lord, if these folks are desperate, they won't have to be begged to do anything about this. And you're here, Lord Jesus. Once we had our resurrection eyes, we could see.

But we can't see with these eyes because you're another kind of a person tonight. These old eyes are not geared for seeing resurrection, folks. But you're here.

Help these people that lifted their hands to believe that every one of them can have anything they need, not anything they want, but anything they need, tonight, right now. My God shall supply all your needs. If they'll touch you by simple faith, whatsoever things you desire when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them.

I'm not going to beg you to come. Choirs are going to sing ever so softly, pass me not. Oh, gentle Savior.

I'll tell you what I'd like for you to do. I wish you'd clear off this front bench down here and move somewhere else and make a little room down here. I want to just ask you one thing.

Your granddaddy and your grandmother used to come down and kneel. We Baptists are getting so stiff-necked and so stiff-kneed and so dried that I don't wonder that nothing much happens. I wonder how many of you would be willing to slip down here and find yourself a kneeling place and just touch Jesus for that need, tonight, and believe Him for it.

Now, I'm not going to beg you, for if you're desperate, you'll come. You'll believe Him. Choir, you've sang.

Pray. Pray.

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