

Evangelism Conference - Part 3

by Henry Blackaby

The church must hold itself accountable to God, see the evidence of the power of the cross, and live in such a way that we are a people holy unto God.

Duration: 40:00

Scripture: Matthew 7:21, 1 John 1:1

Topics: "End Times", "Spiritual Readiness"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the urgency of living in the final hour before the return of Jesus Christ. He challenges the audience to examine their relationship with Jesus and asks if they truly know Him and have been transformed by Him. The preacher also highlights the importance of being prepared for the return of the bridegroom, using the parable of the ten virgins as an example. He urges the listeners to have the oil of the Spirit in their lives so that they will be ready when Jesus comes.

Transcript

John, have you ever been where the remnants of the former speaker were still here? John hit a very sensitive note when he said, we are losing our nation on our watch. It wasn't someone else's. It was ours.

And those of us who have been around a while, it was on our watch. And with all five of our children feeling God's call in the ministry, and all five of them have to pick up the mess that I left them, and I've sat with each of our five. Number one, I've asked them to forgive me for the kind of nation and world that came about on my watch.

And it has been an unusually sensitive one for me. I've had many saying, you're in your fifth year of retirement, why don't you just retire? And I want to somehow say, but I don't because I don't think they understand, that somehow I want to see God make a difference while I still have time to do it. The full measure of the presence of God is granted to every solitary believer.

And besides that, the fullness of the living Christ in whose life and hands all authority in heaven and on earth has been granted, has taken up residence within my life. And the full measure of the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in my life. What then should be the expression of their presence through my life? And I'm one that believes that this generation has lost any sense of accountability.

That the evangelical community somehow is living as though because they're evangelical and conservative, they will never have to face the judgment. Have you read Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5, beginning at verse 9, where he says, I always seek to please my Lord, because we must all give an account to him for the deeds done in the body, whether they are good or bad, knowing therefore. What does it say after that? The terror of the Lord I persuade men.

And he goes on to talk about not receiving the grace of God in vain. In other words, all that God has placed in our lives and in our churches, he said to live without any evidence of the manifest presence of God is to have received the grace of God in vain. And I find myself going back to the Apostle Paul when he describes himself in 1 Corinthians 15.10. He said, I am what I am by the grace of God, but I do not receive the grace of God in vain.

But I labor more than any other, yet not I but the grace of God that works in me. Have you put your life alongside of that? Have you allowed God to set a plumb line, to set how he looks on your life? Would it not be true that God would say, let me review for you what I have presented to you, what I have accomplished? The preaching of the cross is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Has the cross lost its power in our generation? Not at all.

The cross has never lost its power. Has the cross lost its power in the Northwest? If the cross has not lost its power, then where is it? Where is the evidence of the power of the cross? Here, the question I have to keep asking myself, has the power of the resurrection lost its power? That power that raised Jesus from the dead, defeating sin and death and hell and setting him at the right hand of the Father over all principalities, powers, kingdoms, dominions and every name that can be named and all of them placed under the foot of Jesus and God made him head over everything to the church. Has that resurrection power that defeated every principality and power in the universe, things present, things to come, height, depth, has that power of the resurrection lost its power in our generation? Are you holding yourself accountable? Are you, when you come into the presence of God, are you talking about that power in your life and your church, in the marketplace where God has placed you? Is there anything in your marketplace where you go and live and work that is not under the feet of Jesus? And we can ask a third question, has Pentecost lost its power? Now folks, we're talking about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

And in Ephesians chapter 3:19, he says, we're filled with all the fullness of God. But we are a generation that does not hold ourselves accountable to God. I'm convinced that characterizing our generation is the loss of the fear of God.

And when you lose the fear of God, you lose the fear of sin. And when you lose the fear of sin, you lose the fear of accountability. So we're a generation that's watching our nation go straight down the road to hell.

But the Christian community absolutely does not hold itself accountable for any of it. Where could a deterrent have been placed? Where could your church have made a difference? Where could your life or your family have made a difference? What have we been doing when God was wanting us to be the ones through whom he could make a difference in the nation? And where are we as a denomination? I can tell you one thing, we're not anywhere near where we used to be. And I have been before the Lord to ask him what role, what place does he want my life to have to somehow put the brakes on the direction our denomination is going.

We're losing our influence profoundly. We're becoming irrelevant. We keep commending ourselves to ourselves and nobody's listening.

But is it too late? I don't know. I had the privilege of giving what they call a commissioning prayer at Southwestern Seminary's graduation in December. My youngest son, who for an encouraging word, was at a point where he created an incredible prayer life in the part of his mother and I. He flunked the 10th grade.

He got in with the wrong crowd. And he announced, don't talk to me about university or college, I'm not going. But I'd never read in the Bible it said parents obey your children.

So I continued to be a parent in the fullest sense of the word. But you need to know the grace of God and the power of God is still firmly in place. And I was asked to give the prayer as my youngest son received his Ph.D. from Southwestern Seminary.

If anyone asks me about the power of God, I can say I have a living testimony. But it just so happened that in my time alone with God, before that prayer, as I was going through the Gospel of Matthew, I came to Matthew 20. And in the middle of that, I went to chapter 25 as well.

And both of them begin with these words. The kingdom of heaven is like. Now I don't know what you do when you read those words.

I immediately sit up, take incredible notice because I'm a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. And I'm functioning within the rule of God. It is the kingdom that rules my life.

So when Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is like, I suddenly had an amazing trembling in my heart because it describes a landowner who hired laborers, 9 o'clock hour, 12, 3, 6. And then it has this awesome statement. And at the 11th hour, he was hiring laborers. My heart said, are we in the 11th hour? And are we maybe the last laborers that he calls? What is it like to be called in the 11th hour? That's the final hour.

So when I was praying, I said, oh God, may this generation of those called of you at least stand before you and ask if they are the 11th hour laborers. How would you behave if you knew that it was the 11th hour and you have been called? I went on over to one of the most trembling verses for me as Jesus described it. He describes the 10 virgins.

Five were wise and five were foolish. And I began to think about my own life. He said, there will come a midnight cry.

Behold, the bridegroom is coming. Go out to meet him. And those who were ready went out.

The foolish had no oil, no spirit of God upon them. They had no preparation for the return of the bridegroom. And it said, while they went out to get more oil, the bridegroom came and the wise went in to the wedding feast.

And the door was shut. And when the foolish ones had gotten their oil, they came and knocked on the door and said, would you not open to us? And the bridegroom says, I have never known you. These will go away into everlasting darkness and there will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Then he says, watch. Be alert. Keep everything in place.

Could we be the ones that hear the midnight cry? Is that a real possibility? How then should you now be responding? How should I be living? What choices should I be making? How urgent should be the way I live? And how should I be responding to the Master's directives? What should be the focus of our speaking and our preaching? Pastor, if the Lord reviewed the last six months of your preaching, would he get any impression that you have a sense that we're in the final hour? Or would he say, he's completely ignoring what I've said in my Word. And he does not come before me to let me rearrange his life in keeping with the Word. Well, I want to take just a moment and talk to you about one of the greatest eternal purposes of God for reaching a world.

And that is the local church. The local church is not an afterthought of God. I am so totally convinced that when God created in the first place, he created in such a way that no child would ever be born that was not born into a family.

And that family would be responsible for taking that helpless little baby and surrounding it with the deepest of love and providing everything needed for that child to grow up to be successfully leaving home. And I believe that God intended that no one would ever be born again into his kingdom that was not placed in a spiritual family called a local church. That there would be no orphans in his kingdom.

And as you look at the book of Acts, what did God do when 3,000 were saved? Did he say, go out and find your ministry and go off and do whatever you want? Folks, he added them to the church. And as every one of them were being saved, he added them to a local church. And that group of God's people were to take those brand new born believers and take them from spiritual infancy through the whole process of maturity until they could go and he could put them anywhere in the world and they would have enough within them that they could then proclaim the Word of God and establish churches all over the Roman Empire.

And from that one congregation, when they did what Jesus intended, it is said, those who are turning the world upside down have come here also. So read with me from 1 John chapter 1 and you'll discover that in the eternal purposes of God, our first relationship is always with the Father and with the Son. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we will have fellowship one with another.

And the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, will be continually cleansing us from all sin. We will be a holy nation, a covenant people of God. So we read again from verse 1 so you can keep the context before you.

Can you sense the excitement in John as he's writing this? I think he's finding that words fail him to try and describe what he has experienced. The Word of God which became flesh, he handled that Word of God. That eternal life that was with the Father and with his Heavenly Father, he touched that one.

That eternal life. Now listen to it again. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled concerning the Word of life.

My problem with going through verses like this is I want to stop because I get so excited about what he's trying to say and I'm trying to apply it to say, How real to you is Jesus Christ? How real in your life is the living, sovereign Christ of God? Is this a testimony you can give? Let me tell you when I encountered him. And let me tell you how he so radically changed my life. And the question we need to ask is not have you received Jesus, but my brother, has he received you? Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, we have cast out demons, done miracles in your name.

He'll say, depart from me, I never knew you. In other words, no fellowship, no koinonia, no intimate personal relationship. Now when John goes to speak, and by the way, I often go back in my mind to that very sensitive and yet quiet moment when Jesus turned to Thomas.

You remember what he said? Thomas, it's wonderful that you believe in me because you see me. But blessed are those who will believe who have never seen me. That's you and me.

We have not seen the living Christ, but we have encountered him. And he has made a radical, personal, real experiential change in our life. And our very life is a fellowship with him and a fellowship with the Father.

So, I won't stop again until I finish what I've started here. But he does say, that which was from the beginning, which we have heard and which we have seen with our eyes and we have looked upon, our hands have handled concerning the word of life. The life was manifested, that is clearly seen by us.

And we have seen and bear witness and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us. That which we have seen and heard we now declare to you. Now, what is the result of declaring our relationship to the Father and the Son? That you can have fellowship with us.

Now, he's going to continue that. He said, that which we have seen and heard we declare to you that you also may have fellowship with us. And truly, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

And these things we write to you, that your joy may be full. This is the message which we have heard from him and we declare to you that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another. And the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. And that phrase there is in the present, which means continually, continually, actively keeps cleansing us from all sin.

If a church has difficulty between the members, it's because they have lost the relationship with the Father and with the Son. This scripture says, if we walk in the light as he is in the light, the exact same fellowship that we've had with the Father and with the Son is the exact same fellowship we will have one with another. And in that process, because sin is so real in our lives, that fellowship with the Father and with the Son and with each other is going to bring about a continual cleansing from all sin.

And you will become a people holy unto God. You will become a covenant people, a holy nation, a covenant people with God. Your life as a church will become a highway of holiness over which God goes.

And when he starts to move through you as a congregation, I always loved that picture in Ezekiel. He talks about the river, the water, the river that flows from under the door of the throne room of God. Do you know what happens wherever that river flows? Life comes.

And if you start to read it, you say, that's what a church is supposed to be. It's supposed to be in relationship to the King of kings. And out from our lives flow rivers of living water.

He's speaking about the Holy Spirit. He's talking about the Spirit of God. And wherever the river of living water goes, life comes.

Now, that koinonia, one with another, is so critical. It is that intimate love relationship that identifies you as a disciple of Jesus. I can remember a pastor in California for a number of years.

And I remember a moment came in the life of the church where I watched this life-giving flow of the presence and power of God happen through the life of the congregation. Our prayer meetings were probably the strongest part of our church. In all three churches I pastored, the prayer meeting often was the largest attended, including morning and evening worship.

Because the people of God love to come together. And they love to share their burden and carry one another's burden. And watch the law of Christ take place.

And I remember at one of those prayer meetings a man came and he was just shattered. He had not been a Christian too awfully long, maybe a year. And he and his wife from very divergent backgrounds had come to know the Lord.

And the first place they attended was the prayer meeting. And they saw how the people of God loved one another. And literally laid down their life for one another.

And he came and he just broke and he said, I have a brother. And I've just heard that he's back in the south. But he's now in a coma.

And he's not expected to live. And he's not a Christian. Now do you suppose the God of the universe is interested in the salvation of his brother? Far more than he was.

But he began to weep and he said, would you pray with me? Because I'm going to try and find a way to make my way back to my brother. And I'm going to ask God to bring him out of the coma long enough so I can lead him to Christ. For I don't know what you would have done.

Our whole church began to weep. And people took money out of their savings accounts to make sure he got his way paid back to his brother's side. And the whole church began to carry that burden for the eternal soul of his dear brother.

Now this guy was a newer believer. He didn't know how to do soul winning. He just knew that he could tell him about Jesus and ask him if he would like to have him as his Savior.

We got a word. And he was crying on the phone. He said, you won't believe it.

He said, I walked into his room and he had been in a coma for days. But the moment I walked into his room, he opened his eyes and he recognized me. And we talked together.

And I told him about Jesus. And he accepted Christ as his Lord. And he went back into a coma.

Folks, that's koinonia. It's like what 1 John 3.16 says. Here's how we know what love is.

He laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our life for our brothers. Is that what you're doing? Do you find yourself... You know what they did in the early church? When they had an incredible need.

You know what they did? They sold their homes. They sold their possessions. They laid them down at the apostles' feet and said, if any of our brothers have a need, then we just want to meet that need.

It was so spontaneous. And that was the church that was walking in fellowship with their Lord. They're walking in fellowship with the living Christ.

And they had exactly the same kind of koinonia with one another. I believe that ought to characterize every local church. But folks, I had the privilege and honor, in the mercy of God, to let me be a director of missions.

And not only had I put my arms around a local church as a pastor, and around our many missions that we started, but he let me put my arms around the churches in Vancouver and Vancouver Island in British Columbia. And our association, I had to teach them that when you move from the local church to the association, the quality of koinonia does not change. And so there ought to be the same kind of self-giving love, one for another.

But we had to teach them that. And I began to watch them bind together, and we formed what we called a comprehensive prayer ministry, where every congregation began to share what they're doing, and we helped them together. We helped them have an extensive prayer time in the life of their church.

And then we bonded one with the other. And when one church was hurting, the whole association was hurting. And we literally released people to help every congregation, and out of that we had the World's Fair.

And the whole association came together and asked God what he wanted to do through our little group of churches. And we united ourselves with the people of God and saw 20,000 professions of faith in those six months. And our group of churches started three new congregations.

I can tell you so much. And then when you move from the association's koinonia to the state, there ought not to be any change in the quality of koinonia on the state level. You ought to carry one another's burdens.

You ought to be a part of a family. You ought to say, how can we know, how can we understand what's happening, and how can we participate, and how can our youth go over to that little mission church that only has one young person and they're discouraged. And how can we take some of our young people and go over and bond with that one young person and help them to love the Lord.

And how can we make a partnership with some of these. And that koinonia on the state level, and then on the convention level, the koinonia quality should never change. And when you come to the world family, it ought not to change there either.

We'll say something about that in the evening message. So if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we're going to have an incredible love koinonia, love fellowship, love bonding, partnership, one with another. And God will have a people through whom he can literally transform a world.

I want to pray with you. Would you bow your heads? Have you lost that intimacy within the fellowship of your own church? Would you ask God to forgive you and would you repent and return to him and ask him to intensify the koinonia with him and with his son so that the koinonia can continue through you and to you through your church? And would you take a moment and think about your church's relationship to their sister churches, to the family of churches called an association. Are you involved with them? Do you go out of your way to love them? Do you receive from them? How are you related? Is it just a religious organization to you? Or are each of these a living body of Christ? You don't want to miss anything from the

living Christ through one of them.

And you hear your Lord saying, As much as you have done it unto one of the least of these, you have been doing it unto me. And across your wonderful convention, have you let the fellowship with the Father and the Son create a bonding with others that have chosen to be a part of the Northwest Baptist Convention? And you rejoice that God has allowed you the privilege of walking one with another in a critical hour. May it be said of the generations, if God should tarry, that follow.

There was a generation of believers in our convention that bonded so deeply together that the power of the living Christ began to be expressed in every corner of these three states. Father, I ask you to forgive me for the failure that may have been mine. Areas of my life that I was living without reference to what was really happening in the nation.

Moments when you called to me, but there was no answer. You spoke, but there was no reply. Father, forgive me.

And forgive me, Lord, for the condition of our nation that I have passed on to my children. And should you tarry in calling me home, that you would help me to understand how these days can be profoundly and effectively used in your kingdom to see a difference in our land. Bring back to my heart the faith, the confidence, the expectation of your power being released to turn a nation back to yourself.

Would you put your anointing spirit upon each of us and while we yet gather, would you create in this gathering one heart and one mind with Koinonia, with you, and with one another that will create a highway of holiness over which you will go in the days to come to bring your great salvation to this part of our world. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

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