

Articles and Sermons :: Do You Understand The Time In Which You Live? by Henry Blackaby

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These are very crucial days. There is an element in this nation that is seeking to remove Christ from everything about the nation and to remove any mention of a Christian God. That places your life and mine in a very significant moment in history. This is a time for us to speak up and not let the world around us remove everything that this nation was founded on.

In the Book of Acts we read about the giving of the Holy Spirit to the disciples so that they were immersed in the power and presence and activity of God. Out of that moment of the Holy Spirit's involvement in the life of the disciples it was not long before it was said, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too" (Acts 17:6). It would be wonderful if our nation began to say, "There are some Christian folk who have had an encounter with the risen, living Christ, and the Holy Spirit has filled their life and they are now being used of God to turn our nation and our world upside down!"

Does our nation need a deep touch of God? The only means that God has for turning the world upside down is you and me. But so often we have moved away from the intimate relationship with God and we are simply practicing religious activity. Are you going to say, "Lord, I do not want to think only about the death and resurrection of Christ, but I want to be involved in Your eternal purpose, and Your eternal purpose included Pentecost."

Jesus told His disciples to "tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). They did, and they were endued with power from on high and they turned their world upside down. The same Lord who said that is the same Lord who today is speaking to your life and mine. Would it not be a tragedy for you and me to know the truth of God and then ignore it and our lives be just the same as they have always been, not making a bit of difference in the world in which we live?

Jesus' Way of Revival

There are two major Scriptures I want to use to show how Jesus describes revival. The first is from Matthew 4:17-25. Verse 17 is very crucial: "From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" Next He gave an invitation to four fishermen: "Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men." If they would follow Him they would experience what He was preaching. He said in effect, "If your life is not at this moment experiencing the full presence and power and activity of God, you are going in the wrong direction."

I would say that to you. If you are a child of God, a believer, it is God's anticipation that you should be experiencing day after day the mighty presence and power and activity of God. It may be in your own personal life where He can turn things upside down and rearrange everything about your life. Or maybe it will be in your family when suddenly God encounters your children. But you ought to be able to see the activity of Almighty God expressing Himself in and through your life.

So Jesus looked at the people and said they needed to repent. That is, they were going in the wrong direction. Repent means to turn around and go in a new direction. Jesus was standing right there and He basically said to these men, "You need to repent. You need to turn around and follow Me, and the reason you need to do that is because the kingdom of heaven is at hand— the whole rule and activity of God is right next to you."

These fishermen immediately left their nets and began to follow Jesus. If you read the rest of Matthew chapter 4 you will discover that the fishermen could have never experienced how near God was and how near the activity of God was if they had stayed at their fishnets. They had to leave their fishnets and follow Jesus. Then you will notice that as soon as they began to follow Jesus they saw what it is like for all of heaven's resources to rest on the life of Jesus. Jesus also became the pattern for you and me of the activity of God. What does God want to do in your life and mine? Look at the life of Jesus and you will see the pattern in Him.

As these fishermen began to follow Jesus, for the first time they saw the blind receive sight, the deaf hear, the lame leap, the dead raised back to life, storms stilled and multitudes fed. They were experiencing what it is like for heaven to

release all the resources of God into the life of any child of His. So Jesus said to the fishermen in essence, "You are going in the wrong direction because it is obvious you are not experiencing the fullness of God's presence. Follow Me and you will experience how near the kingdom of heaven is."

Now, that is true for your life as well. Do you know that the kingdom of heaven is right next to you, the rule of God is right near you? God wants to express all the resources of heaven into your life and through your life. If you are not experiencing the nearness of heaven, you need to repent. That is, you need to say to God, "I realize I am going in the wrong direction. I need to turn around and walk in an intimate relationship with my living Lord." That is not just a theological statement. It is a practical invitation from God.

Every great revival in history has brought people to their knees in repentance, and it has also brought near to them all the resources of God. One of the great movements of God is what He did through Evan Roberts, a young man in Wales. He was in a Bible college and he heard a visiting preacher say, "What is needed in the church today is for God to bend the church back to His will." Evan Roberts fell on his face before God and cried out, "O Lord, would You bend me?" God saw his heart and did. History records that in the next six to eight months a hundred thousand people came to faith in Christ through Evan Roberts and those who joined with him.

What would happen if God did that kind of a thing in every life reading this? What impact would it have on the nation(s)? We read the record but have no intention of letting God do anything like that for us. We are in a comfort zone. Revival always moves us out of the comfort zone. We want to say, "Lord, I want You to bless me where I am, but do not change anything in my life." But God cannot bring revival that way. He will say to you, "Repent!" That is, turn around and find out where Christ is going.

God is always at work around you and He is seeking to draw you into an intimate relationship with Himself. When God begins to do that it will create a crisis of belief in you. But He will let you know clearly what He is saying. What you do next will indicate what you believe about God. If He is speaking to you and He clearly opens your mind to the Scriptures, He then watches to see how you are going to respond to Him. We love to say, "Lord, I am Your servant." And He may say, "I have not noticed it yet because when I speak there is no response from you. You like to hear Me speak but you do not connect it to your life. When I speak you ought to tremble and then immediately respond." When He spoke to the disciples they left everything immediately and began to follow Him, and they had an experience with the kingdom of God like they had never known.

Discerning the Time Today

Another passage that I think is very crucial for our day is Luke 12:54-56 and into chapter 13. This is a very significant moment in the life of Jesus because He turned to the multitudes, including the disciples, and He made a very simple statement that you and I can identify with. He said, "Whenever you see a cloud rising out of the west, immediately you say, 'A shower is coming' and so it is. And when you see the south wind blow, you say, 'There will be hot weather'; and there is. Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you do not discern this time?" What He is referring to is that all through the Old Testament God had predicted the coming of the only Savior that He was going to provide for the world. The Scriptures indicated where He would be born and how they would recognize Him. They had all the clearest indicators of how to recognize the Savior of the world. Now He was standing right in their midst, and especially the religious leaders never recognized that it was He. Not only did they not recognize that it was He but it was the religious leaders of the people of God who plotted to crucify Him and they did.

"You mean the religious leaders never recognized the Savior when He was standing right in their midst?" My heart began to wrestle with that. God reminded me that there is a moment in time when Christ will return. And I ask you, "How near is the final return of the Lord?" You say, "I do not know." You should know because the Scriptures give you a description of how you would know. In Matthew 24 Jesus gives a number of things that will happen that will indicate to us that we are near to the final return of the Lord, when time will be no more and we enter into eternity. He gave some very clear indicators. The disciples asked Him, "When will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" And for the rest of the chapter Jesus described how we would know when the final return of the Lord is near. Here are some of the things He said:

1) There will be earthquakes. Has the world been experiencing any earthquakes? Yes we have, with great loss of life. Jesus said before His final return there will be earthquakes.

2) There will be pestilences. I think about the H1N1 virus and AIDS running rampant across the earth more than any

time in history.

3) Jesus said just before His return there will be such tribulation as has never been from the beginning of time to that hour, and unless those days were shortened no flesh would survive. But for the elect's sake God says He will not permit it. I think about our day. Never before in human history has there been such a volume of terrorists who have access to biological weapons, chemical weapons, and maybe nuclear weapons, and they are determined to release them. Should there be some chain reactions, no flesh could survive. My mind goes back to Matthew 24. Are we in the day when Christ's return is near?

4) But Jesus gave one further indicator how we would know when His return is near. He said that just before His final return, the Gospel of this kingdom will be preached to every nation, to every unreached people group (v. 14). Within the last year and a half in Atlanta there was a gathering of all the mission sending agencies in America. They put out on the table every known unreached people group. Then they said, "We will not depart from this room until the responsibility of taking the Gospel to every one of the known unreached people groups has been accepted by some one or ones of us." My mind goes to Matthew 24. Just before the final return of the Lord the Gospel of this kingdom will be preached to every nation.

The religious rulers at the time of Christ's first coming had the Scriptures which clearly indicated how they would recognize Him, and they ignored them. We have the Scriptures indicating clearly how we would know the near return of our Lord. How has that orchestrated the way you live? How are you choosing the decisions you are making?

I have to ask myself the question, "Henry, would anybody watching your life sense in any way that you are convinced that you may be alive and remain when the Lord returns? And what would that person find you doing? What will he know about how you are orchestrating your life?" I have to be very serious before God because I am personally convinced that with the Scriptures I just gave you, I may well be alive and remain at the final return of the Lord. I am orchestrating my life accordingly.

People say, "Henry, how come at your age your wife says the only thing that you failed at is retirement? How come you are still on the go as you are?" I would say that one of the reasons is because I believe in the near return of my Lord, and I want Him when He comes to find me very actively involved in taking the Gospel where it is desperately needed.

Seriousness of Final Judgment

Our Lord was very much aware of how significant the hour was in this passage of Luke 12 when He said that they did not recognize the time in which they lived (v. 56). He could have said, "Do you know what it is like to go out into eternity without a saving relationship to My heavenly Father?" The Bible gives some pictures of what it is like for a person to go out into eternity without a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ. One of the pictures that the Bible gives is that they go into outer darkness forever and ever, never again to see light of any kind (see Matthew 8:12). Do you think that is a concern to the Lord Jesus? It is indeed! He gave a parable about the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man was in hell and he cried out, "Send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue." And the answer from heaven was that it was impossible because "there is a great gulf fixed" between heaven and hell and no one can pass over it either way (see Luke 16:19-31).

Jesus knew the seriousness of the hour. He was in their midst as the Savior of the world and He said in effect to them, "Somehow you do not recognize the time in which you live." Of course, I have to ask, "Do I recognize the time in which I live? Do I know the activity of God?" The presence of the living Christ was God's activity in behalf of that generation. So I ask the question, "Do I recognize the activity of God in my generation and am I responding to it?"

God's Merciful Remedial Judgment

If we know and recognize the activity of God it ought to make a radical difference in the way we live. In the Bible I have noticed God quite often does not bring final judgment with one swoop. He brings progressive judgment or what I call the remedial judgments of God. He will bring a measure of judgment and then watch to see what God's people do when He does. Will they recognize the activity of God? Will they repent and will they pray and will they respond to God?

I believe that America is now under the progressive judgment of God. The sin of this nation has reached an awful pitch. God has blessed this nation tremendously, and yet we have turned our hearts away from Him. So He permitted

9/11, the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York City. God could have prevented that, but He let it happen to let God's people know that there are people across the world who have set their heart to destroy our land. He let it happen and for a while God's people prayed earnestly and then we forgot. So He brought another moment of judgment called "Katrina." He allowed this hurricane to come to one of the most sinful cities in the nation and it destroyed much. For a while God's people prayed earnestly when they saw what was happening, but then we forgot. God then dealt with one of the great idolatries of God's people – the economy. God's people used to turn to God for resources but they now have turned to Wall Street and other things, so God has permitted a downturn in the economy.

He is watching to see what His people will do. Let me ask you, "Are you aware of the time in which you live – that is, the timing of God's activity? Have you put anything together of the activity of God and then ordered your life accordingly? Have you taught your children about the movements of God to encourage them to release their life at this time to God?" If God's people will not take seriously the activity of God in the nation, what would He have to do next to convince us of the seriousness of the hour? God has at His disposal incredible resources to bring His people to repentance.

Jesus speaking to His people said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). You want to pray for revival? You need to be ready for the way in which God may choose to bring it. You may need to be ready with a serious response to the activity and presence of God. In the Luke passage Jesus says, "You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth" (Luke 12:56). In other words, "You know how to determine the signs of the weather." We could add, you know how to read the economy and you know how to read a lot of things that are happening, but do you recognize the timing of God's activity in the midst of the nation and in the midst of your life? Are you then orchestrating your life with God in the middle of what He is up to? Is God actively at work in this nation? Yes. How are you recognizing it and do you know the significance of recognizing the activity of God? Are you then ordering your life accordingly?

I have had several things happen that have put pressure on me to respond. I was in New York City and I was speaking with the Chief of Army Chaplains. He said, "Your little book, *Experiencing God Day By Day*, has been a powerful influence in my life. If you could put that into a little paperback and put a military cover on it, I would like 100,000 copies." We did not have the money to do that, but when God sets in motion something He wants you to do, He always provides. So suddenly, unlike any time before that, men began to come to me and say, "I have a burden for the military, but I do not know what to do." And I would say, "Do I have a word for you! You can help us print the *Experiencing God Day By Day* for the military." So far we have printed 250,000 copies and have sent them to the chaplains in Iraq, Afghanistan and around the world and across the nation. Not long ago I got a picture from Iraq of two lines of soldiers in their military uniforms and all of them are holding up copies of the book in the military version. I thought how wonderful God is to let us be a part of what He is doing. The moment you obey, the resources are there and the ability to do it is there.

What Has God Been Saying to You?

What has He been announcing in the middle of your life? You have been a Christian for many years. All that God has been doing in your life has been coming to this moment and He is not going to waste what He has been doing.

I often talk about spiritual markers. What I mean by that is God will encounter you in a very significant way and that encounter will be of such a nature that it will affect the rest of your life. But God knows what the rest of your life will be and so He starts to put some moments in your life which I call "spiritual markers." When God does a work in your life, mark it down, because today or tomorrow you may be faced with a significant decision but you have two or three options. You can go in any one of those directions. God says, "Why don't you look at the spiritual markers because I do not do all of this, then send you off on a tangent. Of the three choices you have right now, which one would be in the most logical sequence to what I have been doing in your life?" So look at the markers and then read the choices you have and one of them will clearly indicate it would be the most logical next step, given what God has been doing in your life.

In John 16:13 Jesus says, "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come." Jesus says here in essence, "I have many things to say to you, but you could not take them now. But when the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears, that is what He is going to speak and He will tell you things to come. He will tell you what the Father is up to and wants to do in your life."

What does God want to do in your life? What is He up to in your life? Right now He is saying, "Do you understand the time in which you live?" You know the economy and you know the weather, but do you know the time in which you live? Do you know the activity of God? He is mightily at work all around you. Do you recognize His activity and do you recognize

ze that His activity is nearly always an invitation for you to join in? But you are going to have to make some major adjustments in your life to do it. You cannot stay at the fish boats and experience the kingdom of heaven at the same time.

"Lord, from where I have been I am going to leave it and let You do whatever You choose to do through my life. You are up to something and I want You to know I hereby bend my knee before You to acknowledge I am not going to stay where I have been. I am going to go with You wherever You lead me, whatever You have in mind. I want my life to count. I hereby release my life for Your eternal purposes and I will let You guide me and direct me and I will obey You immediately."

Re: Do You Understand The Time In Which You Live? by Henry Blackaby - posted by sojourner7 (), on: 2010/7/14 22:18

Thanks for posting this article from
Herald of His Coming, Greg!! I found
it to be challenging and encouraging!!