

"URGENCY IN THE NATION!"

Matt. 3:2

Throughout the years, we have been waiting for the sign - the sign for this nation to get on the move. The American, the Great American revolution. Every change and proposal. We talk about it as a revolution. The farmers set up their organizations. They promote their interests. Then the black people, they set up their rights as citizens, that they are entitled too. And then the water and the air pollution people - they press their rights. And there is an ecology revolution. The students begin their push for their rights. And there is the campus revolution.

Some of these people sympathize with - all people are trying to get better conditions. And in short, it seems that as the nation goes along, the bigger the revolutions. And Americans taught very glibly about these things. And things then become exaggerated. There are radical, social, and economical changes that are taking place. Very similar to those that took place in colonial days. The leaders then were not out to re-write all the laws of England. They did not purpose to sink the British. Or to fire the prime-minister. But they had a few charges against King George. And they simply wanted to be free and escape the frustrations that had been imposed upon them.

Their concept of individual liberty had been long dear to the hearts of Englishmen.

The question today is, in America, shall this dream endure. The fruits and the freedom of the revolution that took place. The president of the country feels the urgency of the nation to the point, that he has spent days and hours trying to find some solution to these needs.

It reminds us of Antiochus Epiphanes who led his Syrian forces against Egypt. Only to meet the Roman legend with a similar design. As they confronted - the commanding officers met to confer. Antiochus wanted to control Egypt but not at the cost of open warfare, with Rome. He requested some time to ponder this. He took his sword and drew a circle in the sand around the (King), and said - decide before you leave this circle.

This has been the situation of the president of our nation. A circle has been drawn about him - with all of the gas and the energy crisis, and one problem after another, and he is trying to decide what he is going to do.

Did you know, that this is the same sense of urgency and finality that (Jesus) had when he came on the scene - the public act of identifying himself with (John) the Baptist, that the kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Matt. 3:2, 4:17. Jesus had been waiting for the sign which was going to tell him that he must go and begin his work, and come out into this world. And the hour unmistakeably struck.

John the Baptist came on the scene in Palestine, and came with a message. It came full grown. We know of his birth and his journey to the desert, and he had the great crowds. And the pagan world heard him give his message of urgency.

John came with his message of repentance - he summons the people to repent. And this was with great suddenness that he spoke this prophesy and this message. And Jesus comes and identifies himself with men in their search for God. They had heard John's voice, and they had flocked to listen to him. And it was for him, a moment of decision. And it was a moment that happened as a surprise to some of the people with such suddenness. It was like a comet in the sky, his message came - an emergency note in it. The main message of his note was the nearness, the immediate issues that he was about to speak about.

Now this does not mean that Jesus was a religious fanatic. But it means that actually there was some catastrophe about to take place. And this was happening in everyday existence and this had come to the surface with a commonplace experience.

If Jesus was right, there was an unprecedented sense of urgency built into the nature of every ordinary man, and man must live with it.

Whatever the familiar story that we note, the note of crisis and the note of urgency, is contained in our own situation.

Now there are several things about the urgency in this nation. The urgency as we see it in the Bible.

I. SUDDENNESS

Jesus was convinced that the crisis of life are sudden. His stories were full of examples of unexpected developments. Which changed everything in a moment's notice.

Luke 12:39, Matt. 24:43, a householder slumbered. When suddenly, during the night, a thief broke in to steal.

Matt. 25:1-13, a wedding party, waiting for the bridegroom who suddenly arrived at midnight. Surprised some, who had no oil for their lamps. And so they could not go or see to meet him.

Matt. 24:45-51, a group of servants working for a master who was away. Suddenly returned, expecting to find them faithfully working at their duties.

Matt. 7:24-27, a house, resting secure on its foundation - when suddenly it was hit by a wave and rain, and swept away in the resulting flood.

The human scene on which you and I live today, is punctuated with crisis. Just as a flash of lightning across the sky. Luke 17:24.

The events in your life and mine are instant. They are like snares which trap an animal. Luke 21:34.

It is like a creditor who suddenly demands settlement without delay.
Matt. 5:25-26.

An army that swiftly encircles the city. Matt. 22:7.

Now from the Bible, I can remind you that these are everyday occurrences.

Another thing that I can say to you, we cannot control our crisis! And often they come when we least expect them! And so the time to get ready for such an urgency is now.

Now we confirm the wisdom of Jesus in our daily experience if we are free to deal with God in a leisure fashion. It would be one of the few important decisions which he has not thrust upon us. We casually sort out our morning mail, and out pops a job offer, or a letter that alters our vocation in life.

We open the newspaper and we look at the headlines. And this thing may revolutionize our whole day.

The telephone rings and there is the message of a fatal accident!

And everything is immediately changed. How suddenly parents discover -
here is a boy who has been fooling with drugs. Or here is a daughter who has
or here is a daughter who has

eloped with a boy that she scarcely knows.

How sad it is, how swift. It is just like a raging fire without any discretion at all.

Another thing, we may carefully plan and we may use all of our intelligence available, and our national leaders are trying to do this. Despite the capability to control events, what do we find happening.

Lincoln tried as best as he could - but the war with the states went on.

Kennedy suddenly found himself with the Bay of Pigs, what kind of decisions was he going to make.

Johnston suddenly found himself in the quick sand of Vietnam. How was he going to get out of it.

Nixon found himself in the web called Watergate.

Carter found himself in an economic, revolution - of crisis in gas and foreign and domestic problems.

Not one of these presidents wanted to make any decision about such disasters. But they were helpless to prevent it because of the on-rush of events.

If you read the lives of statesmen, they will tell you that many of these things were cast upon them - they were put on their agenda without warning. And demanded a decision at a moment's notice.

All of these important crises retain an element of suddenness - maybe slowly sometimes. But they go toward a climax.

It is sort of like a courtship - it ripens into love. And much comes to be taken for granted. And yet when the question is finally popped, the proposal takes the girl's breath away!

Or here is a mother and expectant mother - she patiently waits for her turn to be complete. And then finally, suddenly, she finds that she has a new little baby - new life in her arms. For which she could never quite get ready.

Here is somebody that is desperately ill. A loved one that lingers for a number of days - then finally is gone in a twinkling.

John Claypool, a preacher, had a little daughter that had leukemia. She

had lived 18 months, with that leukemia. He said one time, that with my mind faced with the fact that my daughter's situation was serious, I did everything within my power to cope with it in a realistic way. And he said, I had an abounding hope in the fact that I did not realize just how hopeful I really was until that Saturday afternoon. When "I kneeled by her bed and saw her stop breathing." He said you may find this incredible, but I was the most shocked man in all the world at that moment. He said, when the end came, right on schedule, that I was dismayed. It was terrible. It was like a swift sword.

The point is, that we cannot hold reality at bay while we negotiate with God. We cannot say now Lord, I want to make up my mind. Life is too unpredictable. We can never know at what moment we might be swept off our spiritual feet by a flood of tragedy or blown off our course by a fierce gale.

There are so many bearable things about everybody's situation. No one has the luxury of his own time table to get right with God.

It is like fire insurance after the house has burned down, etc.

Years ago the old Revival tradition - every evangelist had some death-bed stories. That he told about a soul that was suddenly confronted with eternity. Before his affairs were in order. There are yet others who believe it should be the urging by the love of God. But some of these death-bed stories, tragedy does fall with the sledge hammer of swiftness. Upon the unsuspecting.

Almost everyday I deal with someone floundering or someone who has come upon some kind of suddenness. They need to be free of fear - but not to forget the death-bed realities. But to remember that to get ready before the unpredictable strikes. The Boy Scouts motto - be prepared.

Therefore, we see the urgency in this - things happen suddenly.

In January, 1936, a Louisville paper carried the record drop in temperature as of January 1, 1864. To illustrate the suddenness of the drop, in which the temperature changed. They told a story about a man who went to Franklin County, to buy an orchard on horseback. He left about noon for Frankfurt, but he took the train to Louisville. On the horseback trip, he took a Negro boy along behind him to return the horse. He found it so warm, he placed his overcoat on the saddle. On reaching the station at home, about dark, he had to walk 6 blocks to his house. When he arrived at his home - his beard was coated with ice, from his breath. The thermometer had fallen from 60° above to 10° below zero - and the orchard that he bought, was entirely killed by the freeze that night.

As you think about that remarkable change, things change suddenly - just as the temperature in a nation. In a very short time, things can become critical.

II. THERE WAS SURPRISE

The crisis of life, Jesus said, was not only characterized by suddenness.

But also by surprise. And we know that that is what happened in this situation. Jesus came as a surprise to most of those people. You remember, Jesus expressed the transformation, with surprise. The first will be last. And the last will be first. Matt. 19:30.

"The exalted shall be humbled, and humbled shall be exalted. Matt. 18:4.
The great must become servants, and the servants will be the greatest of all.
Matt. 20:26.

He who saves his life, will lose it. But he who loses his life, will save it. Matt. 10:39.

In dealing with God, we may always expect the unexpected. The surprise.

Jesus told a story about a rich man, clothed in purple, fine linen, and feasted at every day. While at his gate lay a beggar. Who ate scraps from the table, as the dog licked his sores. When they both died, however, the rich man went to Hell, while the poor man went to Abraham's bosom. Luke 16:19-31.

This was a shocking (surprising) illustration.

Luke 18:9-14, he told the story of a Pharisee who prayed and a Publican.
The shocking, surprising result that the sinner was justified in God's sight.

Matt. 21:33 - He told about some who were entrusted with vineyard.
They thought they could inherit it for themselves. Simply by killing off
all of the other heirs. The owner was absent. But the landlord came back
and destroyed them. These illustrations of truth had an element of surprise,
and Jesus said the last judgement, which we may be called - is a parable of
the great surprise. The coming soon indicated the sudden, quick return. It
indicates it will be quick and without immediate warning.

The shocking thing about this is - that both groups are going to be
startled by the results. Sheep and goats - those with opportunities, and
those who imagine that they have certain favors, Matt. 25:31-46.

Jesus had a guest list for the banquet. Where outsiders from every
part would be welcome to sit down and eat with the children of the Kingdom.
But some of these are going to be thrown in outer darkness. Matt. 8:11-12.

In the Sermon on the Mount he said there was an element of surprise.
People would come and say, "Lord, Lord!" And in that name, they would say
I have prophesied - I have done mighty works, hear what I have declared."

And he will say, "I never knew you." Depart from me ye evil doers. Matt. 7:21.

In defining eternity as one big surprise, Jesus was not shattering all

religious assurance. Or destroying all hope for the future. Rather, he was insistent that our confidence, rest in anything earthly - but only in God. If we dare to trust in our ancestry, our denomination, we are going to have a rude awakening. Because our thoughts and our ways are not his thoughts or his ways.

It is recorded that Dr. Bonar never expressed the feeling that the Lord might return that day. As he arose and stepped to the window, he turned and said - perhaps today Lord. Every night, as he drew back the curtains before retiring, he'd look upward and say - perhaps tonight Lord. He knew it would be sudden and he was ready. He was really anxious for it to take place.

~~III. SOON WILL BE A GOOD WORD TO DESCRIBE THIS~~

~~Not only was it sudden. Not only is it surprising in life. But it is very soon. We are tempted to complain somehow. That we cannot evade or get around the swiftness of a crisis. Somehow if God says to us to get ready - and we do not get ready, it is already on the horizon. The events are rushing on to completion.~~

A new day was dawning. The kingdom of God at hand. Matt. 4:17.

Everything in the proclamation of Jesus talks about the eminence - already the seed was growing. The harvest could not be far behind.

Already the fig tree had put out its foliage. Hence, the summer fruit was soon to follow. Matt. 24:32.

Already the power of the Spirit was evident. In the casting out of demons. Making the day of Satan numbered. Matt. 12:28.

As a result of time, which is very soon and running out - a fruitless vineyard was quickly destroyed. As was the time to accept the banquet invitation, or to build bigger barns. To bid somebody goodbye at home. Each person would have to take sides immediately.

The Disciples would be able to get the word out quickly - and must move on, even those who refuse to hear.

Now this does not sound incredible does it - that after 2000 years of experience, teaching, and other wise, that there is an urgency in the nation and in our world today.

Perhaps our most frequent failing in spiritual affairs is to misjudge the amount of available time.

The country and the church many years ago put off the issue of slavery. But with suddenness and with surprise, and time running out - there was blood

and a Civil War.

For too long, the country along with the church and others - have dodged some of the issues, and we have thought. God is going to let the clock stand still.

J. P. Markham wrote a little book - So Little Time. The story tells of a playwright with the best intentions of being a good parent. While working on a literary career. One day when the oldest son put on a uniform, and prepared to go off to war, the father suddenly realized that life might be briefer than anticipated for his boy. In a fever he set about to overcome years of neglect while the child was at home. Only to discover, in the tragic lament of the title, he had too little time.

How often is it that you come with anguish to the realization - we know it. The children are gone. The job is stale. The marriage is empty.

Certainly, we are going to do something about it. But why did the problem have to come to a head so soon.

We need to recover the urgency of Jesus. The patience which he had, that will fashion a solid character.

Remember this, Rome was not built in a day. And somebody will say, but

preacher, it was begun in a day. And that is precisely what we need to do, because it takes a long time to complete the job. We need to get started on it right now. What we need to do. Sometimes there are over-confident people who side-track every crisis. Every upheaval that comes.

But what we are doing today is announcing the 11th hour. We are announcing that soon the bell will toll for you. We are talking about a crisis today, that Jesus is saying to us, come for all things, are now ready. Luke 14:17.

IV. SECURITY

Now if there is urgency in the situation which tells us that there is suddenness, there is surprise, it is soon - but what about security. We never need security like we need it today. We belong to a generation in which we have every peril, every heartache, every pain, politically, economically, etc.

And we belong to a generation which is overwhelmed by futility. If ever there was so many people in the universe that has been riddled with every point of interest. History even seems to have no meaning to people. The universe seems to go to a dead-end street. Sky-Lab and all of these other things taking place.

People feel lost - the end of everything is nothing. It is just like a squirrel in a cage, going around and around. But getting nowhere fast. we have motion, but we do not have direction. We are on our way, but we do not

know which way we are going. We are playing a game but we do not know where the goal posts are. And these dilemmas and these tensions, we ask the question - is there any security or help in times of urgency.

Philip's Midnight - Sandhya - What must God be said?

Gen 1:

The Bible does not leave you in the dark! - but it shouts the answer. From the beginning of this book to the ending of this book - and the evening and the morning were the first day.

Now many people today would not have written the Bible in that way. They would have said in the morning and in the evening. But there it stands - and it is repeated five times. And what does it mean. It means the supreme affirmation that God's day does not end in night.

God's day always ends in dawn. Darkness never speaks the last word. The universe has meaning. And history is coming out somewhere.

In the center of the Bible, the prophet said - at evening time it shall be light.

In the close of the Bible, it says, and there shall be no Night there. The Bible does have an answer, and those who have lost their footing, and those who are in the crisis, and those who are in urgency situations - God can take care. And there are some things that will never be postponed. You cannot defeat them. You live in a moral world. So we reap - this is not the kind of

world in which one thing is today, another thing is tomorrow, and Pilate never speaks the last word. Because we hear Jesus say, we shall hear of wars, be not terrified - for your redemption draweth nigh.

There is a word in the New Testament which burns like a flame. Maranatha - Jesus cometh. And one day all things will be brought under his control. And the kingdoms of the world will become the kingdoms of our God.

Now the Bible has something to say to us. If a man dies, shall he live again. Is the old question. John Burris spoke, I wish someone would light up the way for me.

Well, the Bible has done that for us. Jesus Christ arose from the grave, to Disciples at Calvary, it was a disaster. They had lost him they thought. In the grave, in the garden, the crisis was that he was dead. And Joseph takes the body and buries him. And yet today, we can say to you, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.