

The Ministry of the Night

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer's sermon explores the significance of the night in the Christian life, emphasizing God's sovereignty and the spiritual growth that comes through suffering and darkness.

Duration: 29:09

Scripture: Psalm 30:5, Psalm 51:10, Matthew 5:14, John 1:9, Acts 9:3-9, 2 Corinthians 4:17-18

Topics: "Ministry"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of conversion and describes it as a call from God to move from darkness and wickedness into light and holiness. He emphasizes that this call is constant and ongoing. The preacher also highlights the transformative power of conversion, stating that it brings about honesty, purity, love, charity, and truth. He urges Christians to remember the significance of their own conversion experiences and to continually refresh their souls. The sermon draws parallels between the light of God and the knowledge, perception, and guidance that it brings to believers on their journey.

Transcript

is addressing God. He says, The day is thine. The night also is thine.

Thou hast prepared the light and the sun. Now, those first words, the day is thine, the night also is thine. I'm to speak about the ministry of the night, and I begin by emphasizing this text, that the night belongs to God as well as the day.

Now, the day is universally beloved, and the night is feared and avoided. Now, occasionally an uninspired poet will say something nice about the night, such as, How beautiful is night that the refreshingness fills the silent air, and a few others I might quote. But the instinct of the race is away from the night and towards the day.

That is, I'm talking about the physical night and the physical day. Because we're made for the day, we are not nocturnal creatures, we are diurnal. We belong to the day.

And in the sacred scriptures, much is made of the idea of day and night. Now, day symbolizes the kingdom of God, and heaven and righteousness and everlasting peace, and night symbolizes the reign of sin, destruction, and hell at last. Now, the purest of the non-inspired concepts of God that I have known or ever heard about is that of the Parsees.

They were not inspired, of course. They felt after God if perchance they might find him, and they came up with the doctrine that we now know as fire worship, Parseism, or Zoroastrianism. And their belief is that God and the light of the sun, that God is the light, and therefore they worship the sun, and they keep fire burning on their all just continually.

Now, without any definition, but following a thousand analogies, the apostle John says, God is light. And in the light of the day, we have a number of things that we cannot have in pitch darkness. For instance, we have knowledge.

A man who stands in pitch darkness may be standing within one foot of a cliff over which he might easily stumble to his death, or he might be standing within one foot of his own door and not know it, because it takes light to bring knowledge. And then there is a perception of relation, one thing to another, that comes in the light that cannot possibly be present in the day. And then, because man is a traveler on his way somewhere, there has to be light, nor even a compass will lead you if you do not have the light to see the compass.

There must be light because we are travelers and we must go. And as the sun is the lord of the day, giving knowledge and perception and information, so God is the lord of the kingdom of light, the lord of the kingdom of holiness, justice, wisdom, love, and peace. Now God calls us into the light.

We're thinking about this morally now, and I would say that the simplest and most elementary description of conversion would be that God calls a man from dishonesty into honesty, from moral wickedness into purity, from hate to love, from envy to charity, from lying to truth, from evil to good. And this, I say, is elementary and certainly not enough. It doesn't explain enough, but that is true nevertheless.

And this call of God from the darkness of wickedness to the light of truth and holiness is a constant call always being heard. And when the dweller in darkness comes into the light, what a radiance of beauty he sees for the first time, what a lifting of the load is his, and what a rolling away of fear, and what an inward well of comfort there springs up, and what a seeing of the sun. That's conversion.

I sometimes think that after we've been converted a long while, we tend to forget what happened when we were converted. We begin to take ourselves for granted like a couple that have been married a couple of years or so. The radiance of the first day in the new home fades away, and they begin to take each other for granted.

I think we Christians ought every once in a while, just for the sake of making our own soul, giving our own souls a refresher, I think that we ought to go over our conversion again and see what did happen then. Well, now, the scripture says that the day belongs to God, and it's talking about the moral part of things, the light, the holiness, the morality, the purity, the joy. That all belongs to God.

But it also says the night belongs to God, and here we come to a different meaning of the word, because the word that we see it here, it's an extension. It's borrowed from the old world, just as Israel down in Egypt had the night all around about them, and the night was God's night, and it belonged to God. Nevertheless, they had light in their dwelling.

Now, many of God's children can't stand the night, and I must explain again that by the night, I do not mean wickedness now, but I mean that state of affairs which wickedness has brought to the world, which we must live in the midst of, but which we are no part of. All the evil that's in the world is here, and it is

darkness. And to you and me, we must remember that the sovereign God holds that in his hand, too.

If there were any part of God's world that he did not have control over, there would soon be a rebellion that would shake the throne on high. But God the sovereign God, the night also is his, and though he has no affinity with the wickedness of the world, he is yet in control of the world, and the darkness that comes around us is also in his hand, and we are in his hand. Now, there are those of God's children who cannot learn this.

They fear the night, and they wither in the darkness. They are children of the lonely of the day, and they have never learned the ministry of the dark night of the soul. God has to leave a light on for them, as we sometimes leave a light on for a frightened child until it goes to sleep.

And God has to keep some people out of trouble because they're not strong enough spiritually ever to know how to deal with trouble, and if they don't have trouble, they'll not have growth, and so there's the vicious circle. God can't expose them to the night, and yet they can't grow until they've had their cooling dues of the night. Now, there are others that learn to walk in darkness.

They're not walking morally in darkness, but they're living in a dark world, as Peter said, that we're living in the darkness, holding forth the word of truth. Now, we're thinking of the better aspects of the night, not, as I've repeated, the moral evil, but the inconveniences and the hindrances and the tribulations that result from living in a world of night. Now, the sovereign God, I repeat, forces even the darkness to serve his will and compels the solemn night to discipline his children.

You and I never want it to rain. We want the sun to shine continually, but if the sun shone continually, the earth would be baked so hard you couldn't sink a pick into it. It takes the cool rain mingled with the warm sun to produce the vegetation and to bless the flora and the fauna which God has given us richly to enjoy.

In the book of 2 Corinthians, there's a passage very dear to my heart. It says this. It says, For our life affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

While we look not at the things which are seen, but of the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. I want you to see the sharp contrast here.

There is affliction, but it is light. There is glory, but it is heavy. There is affliction, but it is for a moment.

There is glory, but it is eternal. If we keep this in mind, we'd not be afraid of the night, and we wouldn't always have to have God put a light on to keep us from whimpering. Now, the night has a ministry to you and me.

By the night, again, I say I mean not sin, I mean the circumstances in a fallen world, the situation we're in, the occasional visitation of sickness, the loss of a loved one, the failure of our hopes, and the disappointment we have when people fail us. All of these things, attacks of the enemy and of the devil himself coming to us, all these are, in a sense, darkness at work, and we're in the midst of it, and we can't escape it. The scriptures of truth teach us this, and the hymns that we sing so often teach us this.

I'm quite astonished how we sing one way and believe another, how we sing one thing and hold another thing to be true. I think we ought to go over our hymns, and the ones we determine not to believe, throw out and save ink and trouble. I believe that if they're true, we ought to hold them to be true, and if they're

not, we ought bluntly to say so and get candid.

God loves candid people, and he has very little to do with conventional things, merely for convention's sake. So if it isn't so that there is joy, that the cross is a beautiful thing to carry, and that their joy comes in the morning after a night of weeping, if it's not true, then we ought to quit quoting. If it is true, we ought to start believing it.

God discovers once in a while a soul that he can trust, and he lets the mysterious signs come to them, the mysterious evidences that they've been chosen out of him, and his hand is laid on their shoulder, and he's marked them as being different. They're going to be great Christians, great souls. Why, let us not think for a moment that all people are alike in the world.

They're certainly not all alike in the kingdom of Adam. There are ignorant men and educated men, great men and simple men, small men and large men. There are people with many talents and people with few, and the few with none.

They're not all alike in this world, and they're not going to be alike in the kingdom of light either. Men in the kingdom of light, some are slated for greatness in God's kingdom, and some will simply be there, I suppose, to sit on a golden chair and fill up the heaven. I don't know what else they're for.

I have known lots of the Lord's people. They're going to go to heaven by the grace of God, but they've never been much use here, and there probably won't be much account there unless the Lord has a new way of doing things that he hasn't revealed in the sacred scriptures. But there are some that the Lord laid his hand on, and they're going to be great in God.

They're going to be great. I don't mean famous, I mean great in God. They're going to be rich beyond all the dreams of avarice.

God is employing every means to make them spiritually great. He is using the day with its sun, and he is using the night with its darkness. He is using good people with their hope and cheer, and he is using bad people with their persecution.

He is using health with its buoyancy and perhaps illness. I don't know whether this is Lee's majesty and modernism, to say it in an Alliance Church, but I'd rather believe the Bible than believe what I find in a book somewhere. In the Bible I find that a man got sick, and when he got sick he turned unto the Lord.

Do you remember that? He said, Before I was afflicted I went astray, but after that I returned unto the Lord. And I believe what the churches believe through the centuries, that the Lord sometimes chastens his people by letting illness happen to them. You find that in 1 Corinthians 11, and you find much else in the scriptures that would teach the same thing.

So every time you get a pain, don't accept the modern silly idea that that pain is the result of your failing the Lord somewhere, while the Lord may turn that pain into glory. Our sister here was poetic. I enjoyed that.

I'd like to expand that. She said, When she heard that woman pray, that little dirty room became a palace, and that hard bed became a beauty-dressed mattress, and that rough old weather-beaten board table became a hugginy. And when God Almighty turns loose on us the ministry of day and night, of good and bad, of God and the devil himself, and makes the devil work for us, catches him, harnesses him like the

dumb donkey that he is, and makes him pull the cart for the saints of God.

God's always done it, and he's still doing it. I don't like the devil, and I'm not chummy with him, but when he starts out roaring to seek whom he may devour, God bottles up his roar and makes it work for the kingdom and for the saints of the Most High God. And the wind as it blows, and the stars in their courses fight for the men and women God delights to honor.

Well, now the night, then, the ministry of the night, that heartache you've carried around with you and are carrying, the night of suffering, I think of the man Job. Job had not only bodily pain, he had the worst pain of suspicion and blame. His own wife turned on him and sarcastically told him that he ought to go get lost.

And he said to her, a woman, he said, I came into the world naked, and I'm going out of the world naked. What have you got to say? She disappeared and was never heard of again. I hope she left home, because I'd hate to think that she was around there burning that poor suffering man up with her dry sarcasm.

But he did have to endure a lot of it, and God allowed three eloquent friends of his that had eaten at his table, allowed them to come and start pouting poetry to prove that Job had been a hypocrite all the time. Now, if you think that's easy to take, let's try it sometime. Job had it to do.

It was a long time. And Job said, when he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold. In the morning when the sun rolls, it rolls not on ashes but on gold.

Then there was sorrow. There's the night of sorrow. Jesus was called a man of sorrow.

That's why I can't think that we happy-fied Christians who always want to giggle, I can't think that we're true followers of the man of sorrow, because he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And then there was the night of loss. I think of our old friend Abraham, who took the knife to slay thine only son, whom thou lovest, even thine only son Isaac.

And God grabbed his wrist quick enough to stop it. But all the psychological, inward pain of it had already taken place when he said, yes, to God I will slay my son. Already he had died inside of his heart.

Already he was a wounded man, slowly bleeding to death. And God staunched the wound and healed him and gave him back his son and gave him back everything else and blessed him and made his name great. And in him all the nations of the earth have been blessed.

But Abraham had to know the sudden settling down of the dark night in the midst of day. He had to know it. And there was the night of failure.

I think of this man Jeremiah. You get around among the preachers as we were at council, and you don't like to say to them, Brother Jones, how is it going down in Beaver Falls? You don't like to say that because maybe he's lost half his church, or they're bored to pray and he'd leave. I don't like to say that because I find that a lot of men who are wanted around aren't any good, and a lot of men who are the messengers and saints of God aren't wanted.

You can't always tell whether God's blessing a man by how many calls he gets, because lots of men get calls that if the truth were known about them, they'd never be called anywhere except to a court of law. But there are other men who are God's own saints, but they're not wanted. I remember a dear old Irish preacher by the name of Cunningham, Robert J. Cunningham, a dear old friend of mine.

He always said he was between 25 and 80. That's all he'd tell me. And I never knew how old he was.

He was one of those men, so thin he couldn't get any thinner, and so dry that even his breath didn't have any moisture in it, scarcely. But he was a saint, and he'd look up at the ceiling and preach to his congregation, always looked at the ceiling. And they criticized him for praying too much.

And he said one time to me, well, he said, if the only criticism my friends have against me is that I pray too much, why, so all right, it's not too bad. He was something of a failure. Nobody called him and said, Brother Cunningham, he's in heaven now, so he won't hear this.

But nobody ever said, Come and put on a two-week campaign with us. Come and preach to 500 ministers. Nobody ever said that to him, because he'd come and stand up there and look at the ceiling and talk in a dry way, but God was on that man.

There was a saint. He walked with God and was not, for God took him. So failure sometimes, keep that in mind, you missionaries and preachers and young embryonic preachers yet to be, failure sometimes is an evidence of the hand of God upon you.

And we Christians can afford to fail as Jesus afforded to fail and seemed to fail. He died out there on the cross and it looked as if it was the bitter, tragic, stupid end of a man who meant well but didn't know how to handle himself. Third day, God raised him from the dead and set him at his own right hand and made him to behead over all things to the church and put all things under his feet, whether they be principalities or powers or mights or dominions, all are under his feet.

And yet he died a failure, apparently, only apparently, for he was a roaring success before three worlds and is this hour and will be in all the worlds to come. Failure sometimes is night. I took all attention to the fact that God sent Elijah to go before Ahab and say, there'll be no rain.

And when there's no rain, there's no water. And when there's no water, there's no brook. And the Lord said, go and drink of the brook.

So his own preaching dried up his brook. I preached a sermon at the time of the Council years ago that I've not heard the last of yet. The man who preached his own head off, that was John the Baptist.

He literally preached his own head off. And he died a failure. And when they carried that head in there, looking out, staring out with open eyes, nobody.

And they carried it in on that silver platter and handed it to the bloated, old, sex-mad king. What did the people think of John the Baptist? They said he'd better never been born. What a failure.

What a hopeless wretch this is. I heard somebody say when John the Baptist died, somebody on earth said, oh, John the Baptist's dead. Somebody in heaven said, whoo, here comes John the Baptist.

It's all your viewpoints, you know. It's the way you look at it. Well, then there's a night of coldness.

I wrote a little editorial some of you might read. I don't know if anybody ever does. But if you might read it on how to keep from going stale.

And this staleness, it comes to all of the Lord's children. It comes sometimes to his children, even to the best of his children. They get kind of dull and cold.

Well, David had those spells. And he had those spells. He blamed it on God and went straight to God and said, God, you did it.

And now bless me and bring me out of this. He didn't go off somewhere and try to blame it on his wife. He said, oh, God, you've turned away from me.

Bless me now. And the Lord heard his prayer and restored him again to warmth. But those cold periods that you can't seem to do anything with, you ever have them, those cold? Some of you never have had warm periods enough to know the difference.

A man who had never been warm will never find it out when he gets cold. But you that have had your long warm spells, you ever notice that there have been times that have been cold spells? I was talking to a man yesterday about this. The old Dr. Simpson had a long period of distress.

I learned about one of our great missionaries, used to be in China, who died some maybe a year ago or a little more. And he was a great, bold fellow with a heavy voice, a loud, heavy voice. And you'd think, there's a man who never had a minute's doubt in his life.

But when he came down toward his last, he began to doubt and wonder if he might not have sinned too much to be forgiven. You say, well, he hadn't been saved all his life. Nonsense.

Of course he'd been saved all his, since his conversion. He'd walked with God and had been a hero in his field. But the body began to break down and the mind got weary and the nerves began to dull.

And so he had a period of coldness and fear and wondering whether all was well. That's happened often. Holy Ann, a Canadian-Irish woman, had a spell like that happen to her.

Hannah Whittle-Smith, who wrote the Christian Secret to Happy Life, had it happen to her. And I suppose many others not so well-known have had it happen to them. God knows I've gotten up many a morning that if I went on my feeling, I'd have laid back down.

Literally, literally, not only laid back down, but flattened out and given up. And quit planning ever to get up. But you don't work.

You don't live according to your feelings. And the time comes for you to pay your taxes. You don't pay them if you feel good and not pay them if you feel bad.

You pay them, period. And when it comes time for you to go to work, you don't say to your wife, I'm feeling low this morning. You get up and go to work.

We walk by faith. We do what we have to do and know we ought to do. And we pay no attention to our coldness or our warmth, though I admit it's awfully nice to be warm.

David had his cold spells. They brought the ministry of the night. And there's the night of penitence, poor Isaiah.

On down the man of unclean lips, he said, we walk by faith. And oftentimes a glimpse into our own hearts will so disconcert us and grieve us that we can have no present joy. And I find it's possible to walk around without any joy.

I find it's possible to live in the heart of God without any joy for a little while. And by these means, suffering and sorrow and loss and failure and cold spells and penitence, tribulation, by these means God makes that which is outward inward. And he perfects the garden eastward in the soul of each of his children.

Julian said this, and for the tender love that our good Lord hath to all that shall be saved, he comforted readily and sweetly, signifying thus, it is true that sin is the cause of all this pain, that all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well. For the redeemed of the Lord, all shall be well. I wish now we could learn this song here, and we easily can, for it's an old tune.

Hush, my babe, something attend thee all through the night. Well, here's the song, here's the Christian song that comes to that old Welch tune. Through the love of God our Savior, all will be well.

Free and changeless is his favor, all will be well. Precious is the blood that healed us, perfect is the grace that sealed us, strong the hand stretched out to shield us, all must be well. Though we pass through tribulation, all will be well.

Ours is such a full salvation, all, all is well. Happy still in God confiding, fruitful if in Christ abiding, holy through the Spirit's guiding, all must be well. We expect a bright tomorrow, all will be well.

Faith can sing through days of sorrow, all, all is well. On our Father's love relying, Jesus every need supplying, or in living or in dying, all, all is well. Believe it, and I do too.

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