

Having Light in the Midnight Hour

by Carter Conlon

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being prepared for the midnight hour, a time of crisis and calamity, by obeying God, having a right focus and heart, and studying the word of God.

Duration: 35:25

Scripture: Matthew 25:1

Topics: "Spiritual Preparation", "Evangelism"

Description

This sermon focuses on the parable of the ten virgins from Matthew 25, emphasizing the importance of being spiritually prepared and having a visible testimony for Christ in the midst of darkness. It calls for believers to not delay in seeking God, to stand up for righteousness, and to be a light in a world filled with increasing darkness. The message urges for a holy separation from the ways of the world and a dedication to prayer and evangelism, anticipating the return of Christ.

Transcript

Matthew chapter 25, message title is Having Light in the Midnight Hour, Having Light in the Midnight Hour. Now Father, I thank you with all my heart for your strength, I thank you for your power, I thank you God for the anointing of your Holy Spirit that takes your word and makes it alive in each one of our hearts. So help me today God to speak this word and help us to be able to hear it, all of us Lord that are gathered here.

Give us grace and give us strength. I thank you for this with all my heart and I praise you and I bless you in Jesus name. Matthew 25 beginning at verse 1. Now then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

Now of course Jesus is speaking in the context of the last days of history as it's recorded. Now five of them were wise and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them.

But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard, behold the bridegroom is coming, go out to meet him.

Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps and the foolish said to the wise, give us some of your oil for our lamps are going out. But the wise answered saying, no lest there should not be enough for us and you but go rather to those who sell and buy for yourselves. While they went to buy the bridegroom

came and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding and the door was shut.

Afterwards the other virgins came also saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, assuredly I say to you, I do not know you. Watch therefore for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

Now in Matthew chapter 24 Jesus begins this entire discourse by describing the final days of this world as we know it. In verse 5 he says it's going to be a time of increasing deception even in the name of Christ. Many will come and in my name he said in verse 5 saying I am Christ and will deceive many.

And the way I, it's not too hard to pick out a false Christ, but the way I also view this as I read it is that many will come and they will say this is who Christ is. This is what Christ looks like. This is how Christ is speaking.

In other words they will stand and make a declaration that if you're following my ministry or whatever their case is, this is who Christ is. And deception is going to abound in the last days to turn people away from the worship of the true God. He also describes it as a season where peace is taken from the earth.

How can anybody debate that we're living there now? You'll hear wars and rumors of wars and see that you're not to be troubled for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. In verse 7 he tells us that resources will be scarce. Disease will be on the increase and natural disasters in this world will become more commonplace.

Verse 9 he tells us that the testimony of Jesus will begin to be hated in all nations. We're seeing that now. There is an anti-Christ environment that is rising up all over this world.

I wouldn't have believed 10 years ago apart from what the Holy Spirit was speaking to my heart that Christian people would be as vilified in the western world in particular as they are being right now. We're being looked upon as the disturbers of the new world order, bigots, haters, simply because we make the choice to stand on biblical truth which has been the foundation of even our own society for hundreds of years. But we're finding ourselves now in an hour when this testimony of Christ is being rejected and very soon believers in Christ will be hated and vilified.

He said it, he said it's in my name, for my namesake you'll be hated of all nations. Verse 12 he tells us because of lawlessness increasing the love of many will grow cold and that's described as natural love as God designed it to be will grow cold and perversion will become the order of the day. It's tragic to look out today, you can't even go on the internet and read the news without being inundated with perversion.

It is a tragedy in our generation raising a whole generation of young people and not giving them the biblical standard of morality and righteousness. That's why I thank God for the women's conference in this church yesterday, I thank God with all my heart. The book of Hebrews chapter 11 says that women receive their dad raised to life again.

It also says in Malachi chapter 4 that before the Lord comes to judge the earth he will turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children and the children to their fathers. In other words as this world grows increasingly selfish and self-centered and perverse the church is going to go the opposite direction. Selfishness is going to leave the hearts of most of God's people and we're going to come back to fighting for our families and fighting for our children, fighting for this generation.

And what's really of eternal value is going to come back to the center of our hearts again. It's not about jobs and careers and all of these other things, it's about our sons and daughters in our streets. That's our value system, that's what is important to us and to the kingdom of God.

In spite of all of these things Jesus talked about also in verses 13 and 14 there will be an enduring Christ empowered people who will stand as living witnesses to truth until the end comes. But he who endures to the end shall be saved and this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations and then shall the end come. It's so tragic when we begin to realize that there are many many people in this parable half actually if you look at it, five were wise and five were foolish, half who took to themselves the testimony of Christ but they were insincere in understanding their purpose on the earth in the last days.

It says the foolish took their lamps and took the oil with them. They took the testimony of God, they wanted salvation by faith, through grace, they knew these things but that's as far as they wanted to go and they took the lamp which is an indication that I am longing for the Lord's return but it really wasn't true. There was nothing, they were putting nothing inside their earthen vessels that would give light to this generation.

They were putting nothing inside their earthen vessels that would carry them through the darkened days that they were going to face but chose not to deal with it until it was too late. Insincere about what it means to walk with God and to take up one's cross and follow Christ. I am bought with a price, my life is not my own.

I belong to Jesus Christ, he is the Lord of my life as a believer in Christ therefore he has the right to dictate my path, I don't dictate to him. I find out what his will is for my life and walk as best as I know how in the will of God trusting that as I behold him I will be changed by the power of God's spirit. From image to image and glory to glory until it's Christ that's alive in me, it's Christ who's carrying me, it's Christ who's empowering me, it's Christ who's become my mind, it's Christ who looks through my eyes, it's Christ who speaks through my voice, it's Christ who touches through my hands.

It says in chapter 24 verse 38 as the days were before the flood they were eating and drinking marrying and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered the ark. In other words they were focused almost solely on the pleasures of everyday life. I want heaven they say and I want everything the earth has as well.

I want the assurance of eternal life but I want the everyday pleasures and entertainment. I don't want to be rejected, I want to be successful, I want to be admired, I want to be esteemed, I want to have power. Amos chapter 6 let me simply just read it to you what the prophet Amos says.

To a people in his generation who were in the same place that we are in today but they would not deal with the reality of where they were. And here's their condition he says woe to you who put far off the day of doom, who caused the seed of violence to come near. In other words Amos was saying to the people of God at that time you're not standing up and presenting that wall of resistance against darkness.

You're moving with the flow of a fallen society and you're not a contrast to it in measure that God would want your life to be. And because of it this encroaching violence against truth, against God, against righteousness and even against our children from the womb to the high school to college. You cause it to come near and here's what is the cause.

Who lie on beds of ivory, stretch out on your couches, you eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall. Who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments. I love the fact that Greg said today we have to think about what we're singing.

We have to reflect on it. Do these words really mean something to us or is it just a sweet song that we sing and we don't really take the words into consideration. And invent for yourselves musical instruments like David or drink wine from bowls.

Anoint yourselves with the best ointments but you're not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Therefore they shall now go captive as the first of the captives and those who recline at banquets shall be removed. In other words those who live for their own joy, their own blessing, those who are not really concerned about the work of God will be among the first, will be taken captive when this moment, this unthinkable moment of darkness comes to the nation.

God help us. In Matthew chapter 25 verses 1 and 6 it says, Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. And verse 6 says at midnight a cry was heard, behold the bridegroom is coming, go out to meet him.

And so they all went out to meet him, the wise and the foolish. They sincerely believed that they were part of the bridegroom's party. But what was it? What was the factor that eventually revealed their inner spiritual emptiness? You see we saw that here in 2001 when the towers were hit.

We saw in this church people come flooding in, not necessarily from this congregation for if you attended here you were warned that these days were coming and you know you were warned. But many came in and the fear that was in their hearts, the lack of strength, character and resource, people who had been church attenders not just in this city but were visiting from around the world on their knees weeping and wailing, no ability to become part of the solution or the light that says this is the way to God, confused and confounded having played this religious game and suddenly darkness had hit the city. In just one hour, as Isaiah says, in one hour your judgment comes.

That's what God said to the prophet Isaiah. And suddenly this inner bankruptcy, this lack of light and oil and resource came right to the surface. And that's why I'm speaking to you now as your pastor and as your friend.

My brother and my sister listen to me carefully, you're going to need strength. And if you're playing games right now with God you're not going to have strength when you need it, when the moment comes. A gross darkness is coming on this earth.

We have mad men like the dictator in North Korea who just simply lives, he is insane, he lives to send a nuclear weapon somewhere in the world. I could go on with example after example, we're perched on the edge of eternity right now. And I don't know what the moment ahead is going to look like in its entirety, but I do know in my heart that God has called me to call you to get oil, called me to call you to be serious about the things of God.

You see, the factor that finally revealed their inner emptiness was darkness. It was at midnight. You'll find a lot of midnights in the Bible.

Midnight in Egypt when the spirit of the angel of death came over that whole Egyptian society. But thank God the scripture says the children of Israel had light in their homes. It was midnight when Paul and Silas

were in prison for their faith in Christ and chose to sing instead of lament.

And the prison foundations were shaken and many were set free from captivity and bondage. It was midnight when those that weren't listening to the word of God were caught in a storm and they began to realize that they were about to be thrust into some distant place that they were not familiar with. There's a lot of midnights in the word of God.

It always speaks in the same context, a time of change, a time of darkness, a time of calamity in measure, a time when people are looking for hope, a time when suddenly the cry comes into people's hearts. Christ has to be coming. Christ's coming must be near.

Let's get ready. Let's go out to meet him. And it was at midnight and suddenly there was this split in this parable.

But you have to understand that Jesus is speaking about things exactly the way they're going to be. It's a parable, but it's more than a parable. There's a deep abiding truth in it.

You see what happened when the darkness came, when midnight came, when calamity reached its crescent, its crest, then suddenly there were people who saw that others had taken the time to cultivate a deep and abiding interrelationship with the living God. In other words, they saw some people were stable when they themselves had no mooring, had no footing, had no strength, but they saw their standing, rejoicing, giving glory to God, filled with light, a city, as Jesus said, set upon a hill that cannot be hidden. They saw it.

We saw it here on 9-11. I saw the difference between people who had cultivated a relationship with God and people who didn't. There was a split.

There was an immediate split among those who professed to know God, those who went into faith and others who went into fear, those who had an understanding of the hour and the times and those who had no understanding because their whole viewpoint of God was that He's only here to make my life better. And when calamity came, their viewpoint didn't fit into calamity and they suddenly realized they had no oil. They had no inner resource.

They had no strength. They had no answer for this generation. They had nothing to stand on.

But thank God there were another people who took seriously the call of Christ to prepare for the days in which they were soon to find themselves. They came to this house, and hopefully others like it, and they began to pray. They began to seek God.

They began to ask God for strength. All of us began to do that. I remember one service when Pastor David, myself, and the other pastors were on our knees at this altar asking God to cleanse us from things in our hearts and minds that were hindering the work of God and the strength of God from going forth through us to the people as He desired to.

There was a touch of heaven came on the whole sanctuary. God was making us ready for difficult days. We were coming to the city, and thank God we were.

It was a sorrowful time for the city, but yet in this church there was a sense of joy that God had spoken to us, a sense of compassion, reaching out with the answer of God for those that were struggling and coming

in filled with fear. You see, in the parable that I read to you from Matthew 25, many didn't have time to find the strength that they needed, but the good news that I have for you this morning is that every one of us have time now. We have time to find strength.

We've got time to be everything that God's calling us to be. We've got time to get oil in our lamps. In Luke chapter 11, beginning at verse 33 to 36, I'm going to close with this.

Here's the four things I feel the Lord's spoken to my heart that you, as Evan Roberts once said, obey God. For heaven's sake, obey God. Don't put this off any longer.

Verse 33, it says, Jesus said, no one, when he's lit a lamp, puts it in a secret place or under a basket, but on a lampstand, the those who come in may see the light. Point number one, determined to have an open, unashamed, and visible testimony of Jesus Christ. I'm not going to be a silent witness.

When I got saved and there was a young policeman, I remember a senior officer came to me, a Christian man, best advice I'd ever gotten. He said, son, start out right. Put your Bible on your locker, not in it.

Stand up for Jesus Christ. Be a witness for God. It won't be easy.

But if you love the people more than you want them to love you, you will take that stand for Christ. You will be that witness. You will be that city set on a hill.

You will stand, even if you're vilified, even if you're criticized, even if you're called names. For their sakes, for the soul's sake of those who are going into an eternity without God, you will take a stand for Jesus Christ. Verse 34 says, the lamp of the body is the eye.

Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness. In other words, have a right focus.

Ask yourselves the question, what have I set before my eyes? What am I looking at? Because you will become what you're looking at. Is God's purpose for my life in line with mine? Do he and I have the same purpose? What's my goal in life? Have a right focus. Make sure your eye is good.

Make sure that when you're reading this scripture, when you're reading the text, especially of the New Testament, that you let the text read you. You say, God, order my steps in your word. You are a lamp for my feet and you are a light for my path.

Don't let me take evil and call it good. Don't let me take wrong and call it right. Don't let me take crooked and call it straight.

God Almighty, God Almighty, let my eye be focused on giving glory to your name and doing your work on the earth. Verse 35 says, take heed, therefore, that the light which is in you is not darkness. In other words, study the word of God and examine your life in the light of scripture.

Paul said to the Corinthian church when they were beginning to marginally go astray in their practice, he said, prove yourselves, examine yourselves and see whether or not you're in the faith. And you can only do that by having a heart that cries out like David. Create in me a clean heart, oh God, and renew a right spirit within me.

God Almighty, if I've gone astray, show me. That's a prayer that I pray. I pray it for my sake, I pray it for your sake as well.

I pray it at home, out loud. Lord, if I'm taking any path that's going to bring a crookedness or deficiency into my mind and my heart, if it's going to cause me not to see your word, oh God, have mercy on me. God, help me to see what I need to see.

Reprove me, rebuke me, exhort me. With longsuffering and with doctrine, oh God, speak to my heart. Don't let me go astray and don't let me ever lead your people astray.

God, don't let the light that is in me become darkness. Nothing darker than a preacher who doesn't know God. They open the word of God and put you to death with it and put you to sleep with it.

Nothing worse than somebody who has taken the beauty of Christ, the sacrifice of the cross, the purpose of the Christian life, and has adulterated it and made it into something fashioned out of his own mind or his own hands. Nothing darker, even though they profess to be ministers of light. And lastly, in verse 36, if then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, the whole body will be full of light, as when the bright shining of a lamp gives you light.

When I sat on this platform 22 years ago now, I remember one day I was just contemplating something and Pastor Wilkerson asked me, he said, what are you thinking about? And I said, well, the Lord's speaking something to my heart. He said, what is that? And it was that he wanted me to be sure that in my life I had no part dark, if my life was going to be a testimony for him. And I've never forgotten that moment.

No part dark. No secret little thing on the side. No nothing that will come and hinder the light, the testimony of the light, or obscure my view of what this world is and where it's really going, or take away that longing and loving for the appearing of Christ out of my heart.

No part dark. And that's got to be the cry of your heart. It's time, my friend, it's time to get out of things you shouldn't be in.

It's time to get into where you should be. And you know what you need to do. I stand here like Evan Roberts did in 1904 and simply say, obey God.

I don't have to tell you. I don't have to draw up the list of all the stuff that people are doing. You know what you're doing.

It's time now to obey God. It's time to say in your heart, no part dark. No more pornography.

No more going on the Internet sites I shouldn't be in. No more little flirtations in the workplace. No more dating that person who's not saved.

No more going to clubs. No more alcohol. No more of this.

No more half-hearted approach to the things of God. No more living like a coward in the marketplace, in the workplace. No part dark in my heart.

I'm going to stand up as a light for Christ in my generation. And come what may, that's going to be my testimony. No matter how dark it gets in the world, I'm going to be found among those who say, behold the bridegroom, come out to meet him.

When all this world starts to shake in an unprecedented manner, there's going to be a people who endure to the end. There's going to be a vibrant living testimony of God. A people who have not bowed down to the spirit of this age.

A people who have not bent their knee when the music plays and the command comes to worship this new idol of man. A people who have made the choice to pray when others say you can't. A people who speak truth when society is filled with lies.

A people who speak words of kindness and build when others are tearing down. A people who have made a choice to do right, stand right, live right, pray right. A people who come to the house of God and say, Lord, I'm not letting go of the hem of your garment until you heal this generation, until you give our young people a chance to hear about who you are.

A warrior people who fight for the kingdom of God, who realize that we've been given weaponry that's not like the weapons of this world. It's powerful, it can pull down strongholds, tearing down imaginations, everything that has exalted itself against the knowledge of God. That's who we are as the people of God.

That's why we're in the earth, that's what we're called to do. Blessed be the name of Jesus. There will be a people, by the grace of God, who stand and make a difference.

I love the words of Isaiah when he says, Arise, shine, for your light has come. The glory of the Lord has risen upon thee. For darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness be upon the people.

But the Lord rises upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon you. It's the glory of God that's the light of our life. It's the glory of God within us, it's Christ in these earthen vessels.

I don't know why we make it so complicated, it really isn't. No part dark, time to get oil. You know what to do.

Yesterday as I was praying, the Lord spoke to my heart and said, you're not speaking to a congregation that don't know what to do. It's just a matter of doing it. And some will be sitting here saying, well Pastor, I just got so much that I need to do.

Well start with the first thing. Do the first thing, then do the second, then do the third, then do the fourth. And trust the strength of God, the power of God, that you can do it.

But take a stand for Christ now. When all this world is crying its tears, there will be a people who have the joy of the Lord so deep. As Greg said, we might not even have electricity, who knows.

But we've got carpet, we've got feet, we've got hands. And we're going to start singing some of those old time songs of Zion by God's grace. So I want to give an altar call this morning, and it's really simple.

God help me to get light. Give me oil, oh God, in this human vessel. And let your life so burn within me, that people will see the song inside of me, fear God, and begin to turn to Him.

You know, some of you already know this, but some are going to find it surprising. This generation is much more hungry than you think they are. I think some of you know this now.

This generation is hungry just for truth and reality. When they see it, they'll come and they'll ask a reason for the hope that is in you. Make the break from everything you need to get away from now.

And move towards God. And do it quickly. Father, I thank you.

I know I've delivered your heart. There's nothing more I can say. I ask, Father, for all of us today, myself included, that you would give us the grace to obey you.

That you would reveal to us anything in our hearts that would take us astray. That would keep us and protect us and cause the testimony of your life inside of ours to burn brightly in this generation. Father, I thank you with all my heart.

I praise you in Jesus' name. We're going to stand up in just a moment as we do. Let the Holy Spirit speak into your heart.

And you want the strength to start doing right. You want the strength to make the break from places you shouldn't be in. I'm going to ask you to slip out of your seat in the balcony of the main sanctuary in the annexed step between the screens.

The same in North Jersey and at home. And come and just meet me here at this altar. We're going to pray and trust God for the strength to become the people he's calling us to be.

Let's stand together. Take the next few moments and just worship. Make your way down here, please, if you will.

Thank you, Lord. You know, when... Every time in scriptural history when God was about to do something phenomenal, and especially to bring the people into victory and freedom, in Moses' day, they had to get in their house and start partaking of the lamb. In Joshua's day, the reproach of Egypt had to be rolled away from them before they could go in and know the power of God to conquer what needed to be conquered in that generation.

It's an alarming statistic, but in recent research, it's estimated that 50% of Christian men, a smaller percentage of women, but still some women as well, in the Christian church are hooked on pornography. I want to tell you men that are here today, don't lose your part in the body for body parts. I'll tell you what to do.

Get rid of your laptop if that's where it has to start. The students at Summit have been doing it for two years. It didn't kill any of them.

They've come to life, actually, in Christ. Get a radio if you want to watch the news. Well, you may say, what about social media? Well, just get some real friends.

You do what you have to do. That's the point. You do what you have to do.

Whatever that is, you do it. Because the cost is too high if you don't. It's time now.

It's time to make the break. And my prayer is going to be that this church, Times Square Church, will be a place where people truly are walking with God. There's a genuine holiness.

It doesn't produce a weirdness. It produces a joy. There's an absolute joy when you're walking in God and you know your life is clean.

And God will give us an open-faced testimony in this generation, unashamedly telling others and actually finding them deeply convicted, just like in the book of Acts, chapter 2. And Father, in Jesus' name, in Jesus' name, God Almighty, Lord, I lift up this church to you. This is your body. This is your bride.

These are your people. These are the ones that you have determined, Lord, that will hold this light of testimony of your life in this generation. And so, God, whatever is darkening that light, we ask you, Lord, to give us the power to put it away.

Give us the power to hate it. Give us the power, Lord God, to get these things out of our lives. Every one, Lord.

God, that there be no part dark in this testimony. I ask you, Lord Jesus Christ, for a song in our hearts, Lord, that is deeper than anything this world can produce, anything, God, that we can even sing off a screen in the church, something so deep, so abiding, so powerful, so light-filled, so light-filled. I thank you, Lord, that, God, you'll give us a voice to call this generation to you.

When all hell seems to be breaking out in the world, we'll be able to say, lift up your head, for your redemption draws nigh. Father, I thank you. I pray for courage.

I pray for conviction. I pray, Lord, that you would help everyone here to see this is a good thing. It's a good thing to put these evil things away.

It's a good thing to walk away from that which weakens us. It's a good thing to walk towards life and light and truth. It's a good thing, God.

You don't tell us these things because you want to hinder our happiness. You tell us because, God, you want to give us the joy that comes from you and from you alone, that you promise will be our strength. And so, Father, I thank you.

God, help these young men and women not to turn back. Jesus, Son of God, give us strength not to turn back now. Help us to go forward, Lord, and to be a holy people set apart for you, O God.

Let the praises, Lord, of your cross and what you did be on our lips. Let the glory, Lord, of your light be in our soul. Father, we thank you for this, O God.

Cleanse our homes, O God. Cleanse our homes, Lord, of everything that shouldn't be there. Give us the burden to pray again with faith like we've never known.

Give us, O God, nets to bring in a harvest, Lord, like we've never experienced. Jesus, Son of God, be glorified in your church one more time. Before you come, Lord, be glorified in your church, O God.

We ask it in your precious name. Hallelujah to the Lamb of God. Thank you, Lord.

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