

Getting Used to the Dark

by Vance Havner

We're living in a time when people are getting used to the dark, but as Christians, we need to let the light shine and avoid becoming desensitized to evil.

Duration: 29:55

Scripture: John 4:10

Topics: "Apostasy"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the current state of the world and warns about the subtle brainwashing that is leading towards a homogenized world church and state, preparing for the arrival of the antichrist. He emphasizes the importance of believing in Jesus as the only way to salvation and highlights the crisis of faith that humanity is facing. The preacher uses the analogy of sitting in a dark room to describe how people have become accustomed to living in spiritual darkness, despite the abundance of artificial illumination in the world. He concludes by highlighting the extreme depravity and moral corruption that is prevalent in society today.

Transcript

I stumbled into the dimly lit dungeon, fumbled for a chair and mumbled that I needed a flashlight to read the menu. When the food came, I ate it by faith and not by sight. Gradually, however, I began to make out objects a little more distinctly.

You know how it is if you sit a while in a dark room. And my friend remarked, funny isn't it how you get used to the dark? And I said, you've given me a new sermon subject, getting used to the dark. For one thing, we're living in the dark.

We're living in the closing chapter of an age dominated by the prints and powers of darkness. And men do love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. The night is far spent, and the blackness is more extensive and more intensive and more excessive as it deepens just before the dawn.

Mammoth Cave is not limited to Kentucky. It's universal today. We're all in it.

Strangely enough, we never had more artificial illumination, never had less light than we have tonight. Bosley, man walks around in unprecedented brilliance, but his soul dwells in unmitigated darkness. He can release nuclear glory that outdazzles the sun, but he has gotten so far with his head that his heart has

been outdistanced, and with his head he plans his own destruction.

He can put satellites in the sky, but let himself is a wandering star for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. The depths of present-day human depravity are too vile for any word in our language to describe. We're not seeing ordinary moral corruption these days.

These terrible things you're reading about in the papers, this is not ordinary meanness. We've always had that. We are seeing a double distilled and compounded demonism in weird and uncanny combinations and concoctions of iniquity that were never heard of a generation ago.

And this putrefaction of the carcass of civilization waiting for the vultures of judgment is not peculiar to Skid Row. It shows up in the top brackets of society. There are plenty of prodigals today living morally among the swine, although garbed in purple and fine linen.

Bishop Kilgo of the Methodist Church used to say there is no difference in reality between the idle rich and the idle poor. The crowds who loaf in gorgeous hotels and the crowds who tramp the land in rags, no difference except in the cost of their wardrobes and the price of their meals. The scriptures speak of gross darkness.

Well, the English language is a little tricky sometimes. Gross can mean twelve dozen. It can mean intense, concentrated darkness.

We had a country preacher in my part of the country who said gross darkness is 144 times darker than ordinary darkness. Man lives in concentrated night, and even his nuclear flashlight can't pierce him. In the second place, not only do we live in the dark, but we get used to it.

Christians get used to it. I want to warn you tonight, the best way I know how, of a slow and subtle and sinister brainwashing process that is gradually desensitizing all of us to evil. You're not aware of it.

That's the trouble. Little by little, sin is made to appear less sinful until the light within us becomes darkness, and how great is that darkness? Our magazines are loaded with sordid crime, the news stands with corruption, and we're engulfed in a tidal wave of pornographic filth. Television has put us in the dark more ways than one with Sodom and Gomorrah in the living room.

We get used to it. We get acclimated to it. We accept it as a matter of course, its language and its art and its literature and its music.

We learn to live in it without an inner protest anymore. We don't hate evil. We don't abhor that which is evil.

We don't abstain from the very appearance of evil. We get used to the dark. You remember a lot.

He was a righteous man, and I would have known it if it hadn't been for the New Testament. But he moved into Sodom, lived in it, became city councilman. I know that his righteous soul respects from day to day with their unlawful deeds, but he lost his influence with his family, had to flee for his life, died in disgrace.

I've met a lot of lots in the last few years, and as it was in the days of lots, so shall it be, and so it is. And they tell us now, even in some evangelical circles, that we ought to hop off with Sodom and get chummy with Gomorrah in order to convert them. And the argument is that old, that the end justifies the means, forgetting that the means determines the end.

If you use an unworthy means, you've already spoiled the objective before you get to it. And these dear people are not turning the light on in Sodom, they're just getting used to the dark. I heard of an Irishman who came over here and stayed a year, and then his wife came over to join him, and after a few days she said, don't they talk funny over here? He said, you ought to have heard them a year ago when I came over here.

See what I mean? We were talking just as funny as ever, but he was used to it. Now, the worst of all this is that we get to where we think it's getting brighter, just as you sit in a dark room long enough, you think it's brighter. Men may dwell so long in darkness that they think the day is dawning.

I believe that what some people call the birth pangs of a new age are just the dying gasps of this. Science has performed many wonders, we've split the atom and gone to the moon, but the scene is not getting brighter, we're just getting used to the dark. We call it well-mindedness, tolerance, peaceful coexistence, it really is, with evil.

And in an effort to establish communion between light and darkness, this process reaches out in all directions, even in evangelical Christianity. It's possible to fraternize with unbelievers until false doctrine becomes less and less objectionable, until we come to terms with it and incorporate it eventually into the fellowship of truth. Some begin by opening the doors to borderline sects and cults who believe almost like we do, and then others want to make a crazy quilt out of all the religions.

They call it a syncretism. That's just a highfalutin word for hash. I never eat hash away from home because I don't know what it's made of, never eat it at home because I do know what it's made of.

These theological chefs today are mixing all kinds of mulligan stews, and they fancy that the darkness is lifting, and it's getting used to it. Now the same danger exists in the world of doctrine and conduct. You can live in a twilight zone in your conduct, and in conditions of low visibility until you find the practices of this world less repulsive than you did.

You think it's your mind broadening when it's just your conscience stretching. You renounce what you call phariseeism and the puritanism of your early days. You have a good word for dancing and smoking and cocktails and all the rest of it, and instead of passing up vanity fair, you spend your vacation there maybe.

You prefer the borderline to beulah land. When young people have question and answer periods, so many times they usually ask about the same questions, and it generally boils down to this with a lot of them. How much like the world can I be and still be a Christian? How much of this world can I enjoy and still go to heaven? How near to the precipice can I walk without going over? Instead of asking how much like the Lord can I be and how little like the world, it amounts to this, although they and old people are the same way, they'd never put it that way.

The point really is how much of the world can I incorporate into my program and still get to heaven? You remember Bunyan's immortal prose when he told us about the Christians at Vanity Fair. I love this old way of saying it. And as they wondered at their apparel, so they did likewise at their speech, for few could understand what they said.

They naturally spoke the language of Canaan, but they that kept the fair were men of this world, so that from one end of the fair to the other they seemed barbarians to each other. Now, we don't seem like barbarians to this world today, we're too much like it. The operators of Vanity Fair today wouldn't see

much difference in clothes, conversation, or conduct.

The average church member today. Now, this sort of business doesn't come on us all of a sudden. You remember those immortal lines of Pope? Vice is a monster of such frightful mean as to be hated needs but to be seen, yet seen too oft, familiar with the face we first endure, then pity, then embrace.

If the proprietors of the modern Vanity Fair could watch the average church member, if those old fellas back in Bunyan's day would behold the modern professing Christian, especially in the summertime, wearing in public a garb which you should never have come down the stairs at home, they wouldn't look like barbarians. I'm always glad when fall comes and the saints get back in their clothes, if not in their right minds. Now, here's how it works.

The other day a secular journalist in a non-religious magazine said, the desensitization of 20th century man is more than a danger to the common safety. There are some things we have no right ever to get used to. One is brutality and the other is the irrational.

Both have now come together and are moving toward a dominant pattern. Now, there was a time when sin shocked us. It'd have to be pretty bad to shock most people, most Christians today.

As the brainwashing progresses, what once amazed us only amuses us. We laugh at the shady joke and unfortunately tragedy has become comedy in America. We're laughing at things today we ought to cry about.

It's the strategy of tolerance and acceptance and this permissiveness that you've been hearing about here this week. Dr. Jowett, that prince of preachers, said to preachers, we are tempted to leave our noontide lights behind in our study to move among men with a dark lantern which we can manipulate to suit our company. We pay the tribute of smiles to the low business standard.

We pay the tribute of laughter to the fashionable jest. We pay the tribute of easy tolerance to ambiguous pleasures. We seek to be all things to all men, to please all.

We run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. We've become victims of illicit compromise. There's nothing distinctive about our character.

And then he spoke about ministers wearing gray when they mix with the businessmen of the congregation and talking gray in conversation with them. Nothing's definite. Everything's fuzzy today.

Black and white have become smudged into indefinite gray. The housewife who moves out to suburbia and wants to get along with the group spirit of the community faces that same problem. The organization man at the boss's party.

The student on a pagan campus. All kinds of new techniques are being worked out now on how to socialize at Vanity Fair. But Bunyan's Pilgrims had the right idea.

We're not here to learn how to live in the dark. We're here to learn how to walk in the light. It's hard to find an old-fashioned sinner anymore.

They're scarcer than whooping crankies over the country. Adulterous, free love, the drunkard, the respectable alcoholic, sodomy, homosexuality have been elevated into good society. The murderer is temporarily insane.

Parents say, what's the use? I can't use discipline. Nobody up and down the block uses it. Pastors quit preaching on sin.

These things are here to stay, they say. Might as well accept the status quo and live with it. There was a time when ministers spoke forth rightly and named things.

We don't name anything anymore. Many have discernment on how to preach so as to convert nobody. He said, preach on sin, but never mention any of the sins of your congregation.

That'll do it. They'll all go out and say sin's bad, but they won't get under conviction. But you name something.

Somebody may get mad, but it's better to go out mad than just go out. Anything's better than nothing. The woman at Jacob's Well did not get under conviction as long as my Lord talked about the water of life and where was the best place to worship, and those are good topics.

She got under conviction when he said, go call the husband. Uh-oh. She'd had too many of them already.

And she went back and said, come see a man who told me about what? The water of life? No. Best place to worship? No. All things that ever I need is not this Christ.

We need some more of the preaching today that names something, that particularizes instead of generalizes. It's not popular. I found that out a long time ago.

But it's Scripture. Now we see this communion between light and darkness and all directions, TV programs of 30 minutes of foolishness and then they sing a hymn to give God a tip at the finish. He's got the whole world in his hands, sung to jazz tempo.

Teenagers dancing to God bless America and a mighty fortress is our God, followed by a beer commercial. Hollywood portraying the Bible, and Hollywood is no more qualified to handle Scripture than a gangster to lecture on honesty. I didn't expect many amens from that remark.

Now let me warn you, as I warn myself, beloved, there is a slow and similar brainwashing by which we are gradually merged into this age, homogenized into this faceless mass, world church, world state, ready for antichrist. I don't know what's coming. When Mr. Churchill was over here in 49, up at MIT, somebody spoke on folk control and said the day may come when there will be folk control.

Mr. Churchill said he hoped that he wouldn't live to see a day like that. I don't know about that, but I do know that we're being smudged into gray. When the Lord's sheep are a dirty gray, all black sheep are more comfortable.

Will you remember that? If you're one of these gray Christians, all the black sheep take comfort in your condition. You've become a thermometer registering the prevailing temperature, instead of a thermostat to change the temperature. And when the salt loses its savor, we become neither-nor in a world that's either-or, experts at the art of almost saying something.

You can go along right in the ministry today if you learn that. A lot of folks don't know the difference anyhow. Come right up to it, and then execute a neat detour when you get right up to it.

And there's a line of papers I'll have to listen to. Charlie Wilson was in Eisenhower's cabinet. Wilson came from General Motors.

He didn't know anything about how to be a politician. He didn't know any better than to say what he thought, which is rare in Washington. And he said the next time I get a secretary, I want a one-armed man.

He said, why? He said, I'm so tired of on the one hand this, and on the other hand that. There's an awful lot of preaching that way today. Parity, mild and innocuous platitudes, so that we become not only blind leaders of the blind, but bland leaders of the blind.

You know why it's in the dark? Well, I wish everybody knew the next verse in John 3, after John 3, 16. For God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son.

And this is the condemnation. This is the test by which men are judged. The word really in the original is crisis, with a K spelled with a K. That's the only difference.

This is the crisis. You talk about the crisis tonight. It's not Vietnam, it's not the next election.

Here's the crisis, and always has been, that light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, and his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought from God.

The crisis is that Jesus Christ came to this world and precipitated a crisis, because everybody has to take sides about Jesus Christ. There isn't any such thing as doing nothing about Jesus Christ. He that is not with me is against me, that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad, and this light shines in the Savior, and the light of the world.

It shines in the scriptures, thy word is a lamp to my feet, a light to my bed, and it shines in the saints, the light of the world, in the Savior, in the scriptures, in the saints. But verse 20 tells you why some people don't go to church. Everyone that does evil hates the light.

I had a country church way back in the late 20s, and I remember a little woman whose husband brought her every night to the Sunday night to the services. He was an old sinner. He never came in.

He sat out there in the dark, always in one, in the car, and she sat over here to the right. And I thought about this verse many a time. The trouble with that old boy was, and this verse describes him, everyone that does evil hates the light.

He knew if he came in there, the light would be turned on, and he'd squirm and twist and look perfectly miserable. But his wife wanted all the light she could get. It's a pretty good way to test your Christianity tonight.

Do you honestly want all the light you can get? Or do you want this thing shaded down and arranged to suit your whims and prejudices? Did you ever walk across a field and turn over a large stone, and the moment the sunlight struck underneath, all the creeping and crawling things began hurrying and scurrying for cover? That's what happens to your heart when the light of the world, Jesus, is turned on. It makes you

uncomfortable. You don't know what's down in a dark cellar until the light's turned on.

You don't know where all the lizards and the snakes and the toads and all the rest of it are until the light is turned on. And you don't know the state of your heart until the light's turned on. No wonder some people live in the world all week and sit up Saturday night at the late, late, late, late show and come bug-eyed to church on Sunday morning and wince.

They've got photophobia, fear of the light. Our business as Christians is to let the light shine. Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them, turn the light on them.

Not merely in pulpit denunciation, although that has a place, but by the contrast of godly living. I know the old proverb, better to light a candle than to curse the darkness. I know you can't shovel darkness out.

The only way you can get it out of a room is to turn on the light. But there are some things that keep your light from shining, and Jesus used such simple illustrations. He said one was a bushel and the other a bed.

And he said, is your light tonight under a bushel that cares of this world that deceitfulness enriches that cares of this life? I was with a pastor some time ago in meetings. We met one of his delinquent members down the street, and the pastor asked him why he hadn't been to them services. And he said, well, you know, I've got a business.

And I felt like saying, yes, you've got another business, too, if you're a Christian. If you don't have a turning to god, you won't have any business one of these days. And then the bed, resting at ease in Zion.

Oh, William Lowe used to say, who am I to lie folded up in a bed late of a morning when the farmers have already gone about their work, and I'm so far behind with my sanctification. I love that. That has refreshed me again and again.

I don't know how you feel about it tonight, but I'm trying to admit I'm way behind with my sanctification. Stephen Alford and I have been in a number of evangelistic conferences in the South. That man, by the power of God, gets people under conviction.

And at one time, I won't forget, a flock of preachers out there that were flattened by his preaching. Terrific preaching. One preacher told me, he said, I'm eliminating certain TV programs and getting up earlier to meet the Lord.

I can take it easy. I'm at the age where I'm supposed to be, on social security, in a rocking chair, reminiscing about the good old days that weren't so good, after all. I can't take it easy.

And any preacher and any Christian who can take it easy today is not worth a salt in their bread. I can't understand the preacher in good health who quits preaching. Boy, as long as I can get into a pulpit, I'm going to keep it up until they build a ramp to get me up in there.

Because I've got something to say out of the book, and so has any preacher. And I don't intend to water it down. There's no time to beat around the bush.

I don't have long to go. When your money's running out, you better spend the rest of it carefully. When time's running out, same way, but you may go before I go.

Time, the days are evil. I started out in Western North Carolina as a little boy, 12 years old. Got up in the church when I was 11, asked them to license me to preach the gospel.

Those year old farmers, I know you're not to lay hands suddenly on anybody, but they did it. Said, believe the Lord's got his hands on you. First sermon I ever preached was over at a place called Hickory.

They said, ladies, folks, if you'd like a picture, come on. I'm the Hick from Hickory. That's my hometown.

They asked me to come over there and talk. I had their 100th anniversary not long ago. My father, we were just country folks.

Oh, we were poor folks. I didn't know much. My, my, not only didn't know anything, I didn't even suspect anything.

I remember they take us in an old Ford over to Hickory, and I will forget it. Over to Hickory, I've been in bigger places since. Never been one that looked any bigger.

I look like a mile down to the pulpit, and I went down there, and they told me to stand in the chair, and the pastor of the church stood on one side, and the state evangelist stood on the other. And I did the best I could. And I've been trying to do that ever since, for 57 years.

Not all God ever asked anybody to do, just be faithful. And you can't get around that, friend. It is required just that you be faithful.

Daddy used to go with me when I was a little boy, and then when I was able to go by myself, he'd meet me and see me in that old blue shirt suit. Hadn't been pressed since the day he bought it. And I'd go up to him after I'd get off the train.

He'd always ask me, how did you get along? It's been a long time. Now, one of these days, I intend to roll into glory. And I expect to see him there, not in the blue shirt suit, but in the robes of glory, and I wouldn't be a bit surprised if the first thing he'd ask me would be, how did you get along? And I'd say, well, thank you, because you held up a stand.

All God ever asked you to do is to be faithful. Just let your light shine. We're untouched by the need of our own hearts in this world.

Spend more money for dog food and chewing gum than for world missions. Then you get that candle out from under the bed at ease in a lazy and different time. Take that shade off.

You don't have to tell everybody you're a Christian. They'll catch on. If you've got it, they'll catch on.

If you've got it, they'll know it. You don't have to go around the great big button, I'm a Christian carrying a Bible, big as a Sears and Roebuck Capitol. Just be one.

Let it shine. We need to get our candles out from under the bushel in the bed and take off the shades. This is the crisis.

But I warn you as a close friend, watch it. You good folks, you think maybe that you're sort of the cream of the crop, make it your church to depend, but watch it. Good people today don't like to be reminded of it, but unconsciously we're all being swayed by the subtle trickery of this age.

You don't measure a thing these days by what it is in itself. You sound like a nitpicker if you mention something today, and some folks don't want you to mention anything. Some say don't make that kind of separation.

I do. It's always something that I notice, oh I know that that's a symptom of the disease, but you sometimes have to deal with symptoms too. And so whatever it is tonight, the devil has a thousand devices to get you used to the dark, and you think you're subordinate.

I've gotten over my period in this. Now you can overdo this the other way on a limb, but watch it. We've never lived in a time as tricky as this.

God grant that you may not get used to the dark.

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