

Our Response in Hard Times – Prepare for Midnight

Every week I get Time Magazine because I've found that it's a good way of reading all the international news in one publication. The October 13th edition displayed this headline on the front cover – "The New Hard Times" – drawing parallels between the present financial crisis and the Great Depression of 1929. Our world is in the grip of a downward spiral of fear and panic, caused by unprecedented accumulated debts. The 'domino effect' we are seeing has forced most governments to look at the way financial institutions operate their businesses.

Whatever your personal view, one thing's for sure, this crisis is going to demand some kind of response from you. And as a Christian, you must make sure that your response is in line with God's word. Last week I started a series called "**Our Response In Hard Times**," and the feedback was very encouraging. I intend to continue with this topic today because there are many people who still feel trapped (imprisoned) by the current situation.

In the same edition of Time Magazine (last page), the very last paragraph ends with these words... *"It will take some sustained character education – and leadership – to understand that morning in America is more likely to come again if the nation **prepares for midnight**."* Something inside me witnessed with this statement, so I decided to delve into it more thoroughly (in the context of scripture). But firstly, let us try to understand the principle behind this challenging statement – "in order to experience a dawn (a fresh beginning), you must first prepare for midnight." Implying that there's no way around hardship! Before every new dawn, there is a period of difficulty – a midnight hour. Therefore if you've not correctly prepared yourself for midnight, you may never value the sunrise.

It's interesting to note that the Temple of Moses had the door that leads into the Holy Place always aligned to the east - toward the sunrise. Implying that we should enter into God's presence from a "new dawn" – a fresh attitude, experience or new beginning. God never receives anything that is stale or decaying, and He is never associated with the same. There is always a profound freshness that accompanies God – a new creation, a new anointing or infilling, a renewal or revival that He brings about!

However, as we have just noted, there can be no new or fresh beginning without a period of hardship preceding it. And if this is the case, how must we respond as Christians? Turn with me to **Acts 16** and let's read the account of Paul and Silas in prison (**verses 25-28**). This passage opens by giving an approximate time... ***"Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening."*** Why mention the time? Because 'midnight' doesn't just represent the darkest hour in the day, it also represents the darkest hour in people's lives. Paul and Silas were severely beaten and then placed into the inner-prison – a place where it was pitch-black.

This story begins with the unjust arrest of Paul and Silas. Because they had cast a spirit of divination out of a girl, the local Philippian authorities beat them and then threw them into prison. Besides the trauma of a severe beating, they were thrown into the darkest place you can ever imagine; then fastened in stocks which clamped their arms and legs in an immobile position, probably causing severe cramps and a major loss of circulation. The atmosphere must have been totally depressing. According to the standards of that day, a prison was more like a dungeon; a dark, damp, stench-ridden place, with no comforts of any kind.

Yet, in spite of the throbbing pain in their bodies and the disheartening atmosphere, at **midnight** Paul and Silas were heard praying and singing praises to God! What a strange sound this must have been to the other prisoners, who were used to only hearing the groans or cursing of those who had been beaten. But suddenly, there was an earthquake that shook the prison! The doors flung open, and amazingly, the bonds of Paul, Silas, and every other prisoner were released! What caused this mighty discharge of power?

One word – **praise!** Praise invokes the Lord's presence and power to flow in our midst. When you need to see a new dawn, simply start to praise God. Praise Him in spite of your circumstances and you will not be disappointed! Paul and Silas resounded by singing loud praises straight from the heart. *Joyful praises* directed toward God dramatically changed their situation – from captivity to victory! They were able to see a new day! **Verses 35,36, The next morning** (when the sun had risen) **the city officials sent the officers to tell the jailer, "Let those men go!" So the jailer told Paul, "The city officials have said you and Silas are free to leave. Go in peace."**

God inhabits the praises of His people (**Psalm 22:3**). The Hebrew word 'inhabits' means 'to sit down, to remain, to settle or to marry'. In other words, God doesn't merely visit you when you praise Him, but His presence abides with you and you partner with Him. The presence of God's awesome **power** is directly related to **praise**. When you praise the Lord, He is ever ready to manifest His kingdom power in a way most applicable to your situation. In fact, your praises invite God's power to invade your situation! Praise prepares a specific (and present) place for God. But remember this, it's most effective at **midnight** – during your darkest hour.

At sunrise, anyone can sing! And anyone can *praise* when the prison doors are open and there's liberty. But can you sing at midnight? I'm sure Paul would have probably sung a solo if you had been Silas (there with him). The Psalmist David said, **"My praise shall be continually of You... And I will praise You yet more and more"** (**Psalm 71:6,14**). True praise is a lifestyle that doesn't have to wait until dawn to sing praises to the Most High God. Prepare yourself for midnight by being prepared to **sing praises** in the midst of any hardship. This way you will see a new dawn – a fresh beginning! **Psalm 119:62, "At midnight I will rise to give thanks to You."**

But how else can we prepare for midnight? Let's read **Luke 11:5-8... And He said to them, "Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you'? I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.**

If you desire to see the sun coming up in your life, you must choose to be 'persistent at midnight'. It's no good being persistent during the day when everything is bright and shiny. After all, even the unbeliever can do that! But persistence in the face of hardship is another matter entirely! Are you prepared to do whatever it takes to get you and your family through this terrible night?

Persistence and failure cannot coexist. Failure happens when you quit. When all is said and done, persistence is the ultimate success insurance. Nothing can take its place. Being determined and persistent in

life is a very important it is something that's absolutely necessary if you are going to get through hard times. We all love reading about the lives of people who faced adversity - yet succeeded by being persistent; individuals who never quit and finally realised all their dreams. The courage they displayed was only matched by their persistence in the face of extreme challenges. But sometimes, rather than help us or spur us on, such wonderful examples serve only to make us feel more inadequate. But such great accomplishments are never really about the amazing strength our heroes have exhibited; rather, it's about their strong 'desire' to get through the night (pass through their midnight hour).

The illustration that Jesus gives in **Luke 11** is intended to reveal a person who is not only be persistent with his friends but also persistent with God. In your darkest hour, don't give up on God. And more than this don't give up on pursuing God! God is not offended when His children come to Him in the middle of the night. In fact, it's the very time that He expects you to come. Your midnight hour is when God can be glorified – better than any other time! Too many of you are waiting for the dawn to come before you exercise your faith. But faith is the evidence of things **not seen**.

Notice, Faith sees in complete darkness, faith praises at midnight, and faith receives the warmth of the sun's rays before the morning has come. If you want to prepare yourself for a new dawn, put your faith into action by doing these three things:

- (1) Praise God in the midst of hardship.
- (2) Never give up!
- (3) And nurture a thankful heart.

I guarantee that you're midnight hour will bring success.