"A Knock at Midnight"

14 Sept 1958

[14 September 1958]
[Chicago, Ill]

King penned this sermon outline for the Youth Sunday Services of the Woman’s Convention Auxiliary, National Baptist Convention. A report of the proceedings described King as “the Mahatma Gandhi—in the present day American race crisis.” Written on stationery of the Woman’s Auxiliary, it is based on Jesus’ illustration of a neighbor’s response to a persistent friend seeking bread at midnight. Drawing on D. T. Niles’s homily “Evangelism,” King notes that while many look to the church during their time of need, “hundreds & [thousands] of men and women in quest for the bread of social justice” leave disappointed. King later prepared a full version of this sermon for publication in Strength to Love.

Luke 11:6

Int It is midnight in the parable, and it is also midnight in our world today. Man is exper today a darkness so deep that he can hardly see which way to turn. The best minds of our day, the most prophetic voices, are saying that today we stand our civilization stands at the midnight of its revolving cycle. It is a dark age and a dark world in which we live.

1 It is midnight in the social order. Within a generation we have fought two world wars, and there is always hovering over us the threat of another war. The deep rumblings of discontent from around our globe are obvious signs of the social disruption of our age.

As we look out on the international horizon we see the nations of the world engaged in a colossal and bitter contest for supremacy, which might easily result in the annihilation of the whole human race. We look out and see that atomic warfare has just begun and bacteriological warfare yet unused. These weapons are so powerful that a city like Chicago can be wiped off the globe in a matter of seconds. It seems that all of these...
At the end of Fosdick's sermon called "The Mystery of Life," from his 1958 book *Riverside Sermons*, King writes, "Close by showing that religion does not clear up all the answers. At the heart of our religion is the deepest mystery of all, the cross, where love was nailed to a tree by hate" (p. 27).
things may conspire to bring an untimely death to the human family on this globe.

1. It is also midnight in the psychological order. People are more worried and frustrated than ever before. The psychopathic wards of our hospitals are full. Ministers and psychiatrists are busy.


It is [Sigmund] Freud who is the popular psychologist.

b. In Religion:

*Peace of Soul, Peace of Mind, A Guide to Confident Living*.

The popular preachers today are those who can preach great sermons on "How to relax," etc. "How to keep your All of this is a fit testimony to the fact that it is midnight in the inner lives of men and women.

2. It is midnight in the moral order. Midnight is a time when all colors lose their distinctiveness and become merely a dirty shade of gray. All moral principles have lost their distinctions. Nothing is right or wrong absolutely for modern man. It is just a matter of what the majority of the people are doing. Everybody is doing it so it must be alright. So we have developed a generation of moral cowards. Midnight is a time when everything is relative. Midnight also causes us to feel that nothing is really right but to get by. And nothing really wrong but to get caught.

II. But as in the parable so in our world today, the deep darkness of the midnight is interrupted by the sound of a knock. And in our day it is the knock of the world on the door of the church. And more than anybody else in the church the minister is aware of the knock. Quite strange isn't it that man at midnight will be knocking on the door of the church.

There are more people members of the church today than ever before. 97,000,000. Compare that with the fact that in 1929 there were only 50,000,000. That is an increase of more than 90% and the population in that time has increased only 31%.

And you remember the parable said that the man wanted three loaves of bread. And strangely enough modern man is in quest for three loaves. It is spiritual bread:

a. Bread of faith—Modern man is so often a faithless being.
b. Bread of hope—Modern man has lost hope in the future and in his destiny.
c. Bread of love—

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8. Niles, "Evangelism" "Besides, at midnight every color loses its distinctiveness and becomes merely a dirty shade of grey." Above this sentence, King wrote "discuss moral relativism" on his copy of Niles's sermon.

9. Niles, "Evangelism" "But, as in the parable, so in our day, the tense silence of the midnight is disturbed by the sound of a knock. It is the door of the Church on which somebody is knocking."
Isn’t it strange that in the midnight house of his life when he has stood in the darkness of our generation, in the darkness of our age [He?] groups through the streets of life and runs to the church of God to find a little bread

III When he first knocked he was left disappointed

Hundreds & thousand of men and women in quest for the bread of social justice going into the church only to be disappointed

(a) Look at South Africa—Lead on by a Dutch Reform Protestant Preacher
(b) Look at the British Empire and her exploitation of India—The Church of England sanctioned it
(c) The white man in America—11 O’clock is the segregated hour in Christian America

AD CSKC Sermon file, folder 8, "A Knock at Midnight"

10 Daniel François Malan, a clergyman in the Dutch Reformed Church and prime minister of South Africa from 1948 until 1954, instituted his nation’s policy of apartheid

“Worship at Its Best,”
Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church

[14 December 1958]
[Montgomery, Ala.]

Recognizing that worship is an elemental component of all religions, King delineates its three fundamental aspects

Int There is hardly any drive in human nature more elemental than the practice of worship. Everywhere man appears [to be?] as a worshipping creature. Whether he is a Buddhist praying in his temple, a Confucianist bowing in his shrine, a Moslem kneeling in his mosques, a Jew worshiping in his synagogue, or a Christian praying God in his Cathedral, man is a worshiping creature

1 Fosdick, Successful Christian Living, p 165 “Man everywhere appears as a worshipping creature. Some of us have prayed with Buddhists in their temples, bowed with Confucianists in their shrines, knelt with Moslems in their mosques, worshiped many a time in synagogues, and with all sorts of Christians have shared devotion.” King wrote “Preached at Dexter, Dec 14, 1958” on the folder containing this outline and Fosdick’s sermon, which King had torn out of Successful Christian Living