

# A Lamp Put Out

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Now as some of you will be aware, the last couple of weeks we've been doing a little short mini-series on the subject of lamps. And we were looking the first week at the subject of an empty lamp.

And we took the example of the five foolish virgins, the foolish bridesmaids who didn't keep their lamp well filled. And so it became an empty lamp in due course.

Then we looked last Lord's Day at the subject of a well-filled lamp. And we looked at the prophecy in second hour in chapter 4. The two olive trees that were pouring the oil fresh and straight into the seven-branched lamp candlestick there.

It was constantly well-filled by divine intervention. And this morning we will look at the third and final aspect of this mini-series.

And that is a lamp put out. A lamp put out. And we'll take as that initial text here in verse 9 of Proverbs 13.

[ 1 : 0 0 ]     The light of the righteous rejoiceth, but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out. Now in this verse there is a contrast drawn not merely between the righteous and the wicked, but also between light, which is the greater of the two descriptions here, and lamp, which is the lesser.

In the original context, the sense is of the honest prosperity. That is the light of the righteous which rejoices. In other words, it increases more and more.

Their light increases more and more. Their hard-working, honest prosperity just increases more and more. Whereas the dishonest gain, and that's the sense of it here, the dishonest gain of the wicked.

Like in verse 11, wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished, that he that gathered by labour shall increase. And this at verse 9 is sort of describing this in advance, in almost picture language.

The light of the righteous rejoiceth, but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out. The gain would soon be extinguished. But even the metaphors are telling here.

[ 2 : 1 0 ]     It's not just light, the lamp, a different way of saying the same thing. Light is, in the sense, in the original description here, it's as in the light of day.

It's everywhere around. You know, you walk out the door and you see the sunlight filling the whole earth, filling the sky and everything else. Even if the sunshine isn't out, you've still got the light of day.

You walk outside the door in the morning and it's all full of light because the light is filling everything. Lamp, on the other hand, indicates a lesser artificially creative light, which is needful precisely because it is itself in an environment of darkness.

Now, if you've got a lamp, like one of those old-fashioned lamps, you know, with the sort of shaped glass frame on top and so on.

And these used to be quite popular in the former day. And you have one of these and it's pitch black and it's wintertime and wherever you go with your lamp, that's fine. And you go outside the door, it's still dark, so your lamp is giving you light wherever you go.

[ 3 : 37 ] But if you still get your lamp burning the next morning, you open the curtains, you go outside, you can still have your lamp carrying around in it, but you don't need it now because the light fills the whole earth, whereas the lamp only lights the wee bit that you've got and only does it by contrast with the darkness.

It is needed precisely because it is in itself an environment of darkness. Now, Jesus describes both himself and his people as the light of the world.

Not the lamp of the world, but the light of the world. That is, to give illumination not by virtue simply of something we hold up or carry with us, but simply by virtue of what we are.

The fact that wherever we go, we should be bringing that light just by our very presence. An atmosphere and a place should be different. It should be improved.

It should be better when there is a Christian in it. Let's say you've got a work environment which is perhaps hard and anti-Christian and rough and full of foul language and whatever, and just by a Christian coming in there and working there, that should have a softening, beneficial, kindlier effect.

[ 4 : 53 ] Just imperceptibly, it can and it should and it will have that effect of bringing light into that darkness. Even without words, even without expressly evangelistic activity.

Just by being there because we are meant to be. We are, Jesus says, if we are in him, the light of the world. And yet, and yet the church's light or the individual Christian's light is always, in a sense, a borrowed light.

Or at the very least, a reflected light. It is not a light that originates with us. We, as Christians, are the light of the world only in so far as we shine with the light of Christ.

It might be fair to say, to use another illustration, maybe not so much as a reflective light, like the moon reflects the light of the sun, but perhaps a light that is only able to shine because it's connected in, connected to the ultimate power source.

We can shine with the light of Christ if we are connected to him. The Christian in a dark environment, a workplace or a harsh situation or a prison or something like that, somewhere where it's very dark, where it's very, you know, worldly, anti-Christian and so on.

[ 6 : 12 ] And he or she goes into that environment, into that place. They will be of light and of good and of benefit, only to the extent that they are connected to the power source in Christ.

Because he is the light of the world. We are likewise the light of the world. But only in so far as we are connected with him. This is why prayer is such a vital connecting link between ourselves and Christ.

If that channel is not open, then there's no oil coming into this lamp. There's no refreshing coming into this light. We are not lighting up wherever we go.

Because if we're not connected to Christ, there's only our own strength. And that's no better than the darkness around us. Something else that is interesting about Proverbs chapter 13 and verse 9 here is the reference to the wicked.

The light of the righteous rejoiceth, but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out. Now, this reference to the wicked, this is a phrase which is employed an enormous amount in Scripture, as I'm sure you know.

[ 7 : 14 ] Particularly perhaps in the Old Testament, but very rarely, hardly ever, with direct reference to any named individual.

There are exceptions. Haman, for example, in the Book of Esther, that tries to engineer the wiping out of all the Jews throughout the Persian Empire. He is described as this wicked Haman.

And Athaliah, the wicked queen mother that tried to do away with all the royal family of Judea and to kill all the young kings and all the princes and so on.

She is described as overtly wicked. But it's rare. It's very, very rare in Scripture to apply this term directly to a named individual.

It is nearly always used anonymously. The light of the righteous rejoiceth that the lamp of the wicked shall be put out. It's almost always used anonymously.

[ 8 : 12 ] Almost in the abstract, you might say. The wicked. They're always out there somewhere. The wicked are always someone else.

There is, nevertheless, a consistent theme running through the biblical descriptions of the wicked. It's consistent. It's consistent. They almost always exhibit the same characteristics.

In terms of their fellow man, they are manipulative, exploitative where possible, especially of those weaker than themselves. And they are often cruel.

This attitude of the wicked to their fellow man almost certainly follows as a consequence of their attitude to God, which is by definition characterized by opposition, hostility, disregard, indifference, and or forgetfulness.

Perhaps resentment. Perhaps resentment. Because God is good. And God is good. Those who are less powerful and who want to be evil, they will hate him. So their attitude to God is characterized by opposition, hostility, disregard, indifference, forgetfulness, as we say.

[ 9 : 24 ] Perhaps resentment. And because of this relationship, that affects the relationship of their fellow men and women as well. Now, when we consider what Jesus describes as the two most important commandments and how they are intertwined, and we looked at them just the other week, you know, Hear, O Israel, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and mind and strength.

This is the first commandment, the greatest commandment, and the second is like it. Thou shalt love thy neighborless thyself. These are what Jesus describes as the two most important commandments, and they're intertwined with each other, of course.

But when you consider what he describes as the most important, and then it becomes easy to see how their direct negatives, in the case of the wicked, are likewise intertwined with each other, in each case.

Neglect or forgetfulness toward the Lord will be reflected in hostility or resentment or cruelty towards our fellow men and women.

If we get the one wrong, we'll get the other wrong as well. If we have the one right, then it will affect also our relationships with others. Neglect or forgetfulness toward the Lord may be where our problems begin, but it will certainly not be where they end.

[ 10 : 45 ] Once the downward spiral has begun, it is very difficult to stop. We all know ourselves how easy it is once a bad habit has begun, whether of neglect of our Bible or time with the Lord or even church or whatever it may be.

Once that begins to slip in, it's easier to repeat. Whereas having to claw your way back again, you know, determinedly going to your Bible, going for time for the Lord, getting there at the church or getting to the prayer meeting and so on.

That's hard. You're really climbing back uphill. You're really swimming against the stream. But once you've done each step, it becomes then this little ledge that gets you up to the next one.

Each little step makes it easy to climb up. But equally and more easily, each time we just slide, the downward spiral, the vortex begins.

And it's much more difficult to stop. It begins with neglect or forgetfulness of the Lord. But that's not where it ends. It just keeps on and on and on going. Now, this is doubtless part of the problem faced by Ephesus in the book of Revelation.

- [ 11 : 57 ] We turn to chapter 2 in Revelation, our second reading. They have lost their first love. Now, if you think, for example, in the illustration of, say, a young couple getting married, you've got the bloom of romance.
- And the early love in due course gives way to the grind of domestic chores and paying the bills and feeding the children and running them everywhere.
- You've become a taxi service and you're working longer hours to try and get the money you need to try and meet all the bills and so on. All of which may be done faithfully.
- And it may be done diligently and dutifully. But the couple have forgotten why they are doing this. Because they love each other.
- Or they did so. They did so much that they wanted to spend the rest of their lives together. And all the rest that follows, all the bills, all the housekeeping, all the mortgages, all the kids, all that stuff, that follows on from that love.
- [ 12 : 58 ] Lose the love and the rest. You may keep doing it. But it becomes an empty, grinding set of chores. Now, I think sometimes people can and do forget that so much of life is chores.
- Whether or not you're with somebody or whether you're living on your own or whether you change your life or your partners or whatever the case may be, there's still chores. There's still bills to pay.
- There's still a grind. There's still so much hassle in life that you just can't escape. So much of life on this world is like that. But the point is that if you lose the love and the bloom of that love or forget the fact and reality of your love, the life and the duties and the chores and the work, it just becomes empty and turgid.
- Those Ephesians were faithful and diligent in their duties and works. But the bloom of their love for the Lord, the excitement of meeting with Christ, the language of the lover had gone.
- Lose that and one is thereafter simply doing religion. And mere religion will not save so much as one's solitary soul.
- [ 14 : 20 ] Much less will it excite or motivate anyone because there's nothing exciting about it. It's just chores. It's just duties. Now, interestingly, in the opening chapters of Revelation, the churches are described not actually as the light.
- Now, it's not that they are not the light of the world. Jesus says these people are the light of the world. But they're not described in this context as being the light, but merely as the candle sticks in the authorised version or other more modern versions like, say, lampstands on which the light is set and by which it is born.
- If you think of the little illustration with the children, you let your candles take. You can take it anywhere. If you're holding the candle in your bare hand, you can't do it for too long. Revelation chapter 1, verse 20. The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand and the seven golden candlesticks.
- The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches. They're not described as the light.
- They're described as the candlesticks which bears the light. So, this is significant. In a power cut, you know, you may perhaps, let's say all the lights come out, the middle of the window, which is usually when you get your power cuts, everything's pitch black.
- [ 15 : 42 ] You might choose to light candles in every single room in the house. You might do that. You illuminate the whole place. That's your prerogative if you want to do that. But more likely, you will simply set your candles in those rooms where you have business.
- You've got stuff to do. So, if you're backwards and forwards, say, between the kitchen and maybe the living room or whatever, and one minute or the other minute, you'll set a couple of candles in one. You'll set a couple of candles in the other.

And you might take one with you as well. But because you've got stuff to do in one room and stuff to do in the other room, you leave them there. Because you've got things to do. You've got business there. You have a reason to be there.

What else do we go regularly in and out of that? I mean, you've things to do. But when you're finished, let's say, right, okay, before we go to bed now in a power cut, that's us finishing the kitchen. So, you do the equivalent of switching out the light.

You'll blow out the candle or else you'll take up the candlestick and you'll take it out and stick it down in the sitting room where you're still not finished. And everything goes pitch black in the kitchen. And you'll do that because you'll either extinguish the candle altogether or you remove it.

[ 16 : 51 ] The candle's sticking out. There's some other room. For this reason alone, you have nothing more to do there. The reason you're taking the candle out of the kitchen and moving it to the living room, the reason why you're blowing it out or whatever, the reason it's now pitch black in the power cut is because it's okay now.

There's nothing else you need to do there in that room. So, it can be as black as it likes. Where you still have to be, where you've still got stuff to do, then you've got the light. But now you're finished there. So, you take the candle out.

That's why you do it. Because you have nothing more to do there. If the candlestick is removed, then the darkness will stay.

The darkness will be, to all intents and purposes, permanent. And even if you go in and out again, lift them on a torch or a carried candle, the fixed and settled candlestick is gone.

Because the need for it has ceased. In a scenario where the candlestick of a church is removed, what that is saying is that Christ has nothing more to do there.

[ 18 : 10 ] Now, let's just take a solemn little example there for a moment. Ephesus is one of those places that can be visited now with, I suppose you could say, Bible tourism in western Turkey.

And coach loads of tourists will be taken to the area. And they'll see basically around the ruins of Ephesus. Because there's nothing there at Ephesus now except ruins.

Used to be a major sort of almost on the coast kind of port. Now it's inland quite a bit because of climate change and sort of silping up and so on and all the rest of it.

It has changed and it has gone. There's nothing there but ruins. And because there's nothing there but ruins, there are no souls there now for the Lord to work with and to call to follow him.

The candlestick is gone because there is no more work in that sense for the Lord to do there. Christ has nothing more to do there. We don't know exactly when Ephesus ceased as a city or when the church in Ephesus ceased to be.

[ 19 : 21 ] For a couple of centuries, no doubt, it was vibrant and buzzing hub. And it was the center of that part of Asia. And people came to it from all over. And you'd think this place is going to be here forever.

But it's not. Now there's nothing there but ruins. No candlestick there. Because Christ has nothing more to do there.

It's gone. To have lost our first love is something Jesus tells us needs to be repented of. To have ceased to love him as we should with the intimacy of our heart, the whole strength of our very soul, the determination and concentration of our mind.

To have reduced our relationship with him to one of mere duty. Drudgery. Drudgery. Drudgery. Drudgery. Drudgery. Drudgery. Outward physical form is to have lost the living, breathing love of Christ from our beating hearts.

Drudgery. Drudgery. Drudgery. Drudgery. Drudgery. Drudgery. Drudgery. Drudgery. Drudgery. Drudgery.

- [ 20 : 35 ] Drudgery. Drudge. Drugs. Drugs. Drugs. Drugs. we did. But this which is described here, this is worse which is described here.

In Proverbs chapter 13 at verse 9, the lamp is put out. The lamp of the wicked shall be put out, which implies a deliberate intervention from outside when the amount of fuel or wax and wick might still have been sufficient to go on a good deal longer.

The lamp has been put out, snuffed out, blown out. It has been extinguished. Not by simple natural wastage and all the resources having been used up. It has been put out.

Why would anyone do that? They would do it like with the removal of the candlestick. They would do it if they are finished with the purpose for which the lamp was lit in the first place.

Go back to your power cut scenario. Here you are with your candles in the kitchen but now you've finished your stuff in the kitchen. You're just going through it to do whatever you're doing in the living room before you go off to bed. Finish in the kitchen. What do you do?

- [ 21 : 52 ] Move the candlestick and just blow it out. Or lick your fingers and squeeze the wick like some people do. It is extinguished. It is put out. And the reason you do it is because you are finished with the purpose for which the lamp was lit in the first place.

Like the threatened removal of the candlestick in Revelation. What is the purpose then for which the lamp was ever lit in our own hearts or in this or any other congregation?

Tragically, and not just in ancient history, of course, the Scottish Church and the Island Church too, as we know ourselves, has been beset by a situation of divisions and counter-divisions.

Sometimes that has been through enmity or strife as when one denomination breaks up from another. Sometimes it's just for greater administration purposes.

You know, for example, at one stage, there was only four parishes in the whole of Lewis. And likewise, Harris was one whole parish, one huge, massive parish.

- [ 23 : 04 ] And they became subdivided. And they became subdivided so that the gospel could be taken out more efficiently. If you take Lachs, for example, where I used to minister, that was one huge parish area.

It stretched from Lennon in the south to Shabos. But eventually they subdivided it. And they chopped off Park. And then they chopped off King Lach. And then Shabos was chopped out as well.

So now, what is presently described as Lachs Parry, it's a lot less than it used to be. And that was to help people. That was for good. That was so that more localized congregations could bring the gospel ministrations more efficiently to more people.

So it's a perfectly good reason. So division and subdivision. But sometimes denominations multiply because people disagree. They disagree, perhaps, about the best or most proficient way to bring the gospel to people.

Or they disagree about their emphasis on the sacraments. Like our Baptist brothers and sisters, you know, they believe that the way that baptism is done is the most important thing of all. So they have separate congregations for that.

- [ 24 : 15 ] Or historically, as we know, denominations divide one from another. Differences over how the love of Christ should be preached and expressed and received have brought many congregations.

Let's leave aside denominational badges for a moment. Let's just say many different congregations into being. And yet, in the providence of God, there were obviously souls whom he intended to gather into his fold by means of a particular congregation.

All of these different congregations, yes, in the denominations too, all of them will be gathering in souls here and there. Souls whom the Lord has chosen to draw in through that particular congregation who, humanly speaking, might not have been gathered in at all by any other means.

But gathering to his fold by means of a particular congregation or a witness of particular folk within it, within that congregation, the light shining from perhaps this candlestick or that candlestick upon folk who, as we say, humanly speaking, would not otherwise have been gathered in.

That is the purpose with each congregation of the Lord's people. It is a purpose with us too. Part of the reason we exist to be a means of gathering souls in through this particular gathering of the Lord's people who, might, humanly speaking, not otherwise perhaps have been gathered in at all.

[ 25 : 55 ] It is a solemn thought. But I think also an uplifting one. Now, again, I can't abide in this as we go on endlessly about the former congregations.

I'm just taking it as an example. So please bear with me. An example of where I understood before which came into a separate existence in 1900. And, you know, in the early years of the 21st century, it had been going 100 and something years.

And I had occasion one time to look back over the communion roll record all the way back to 1900 on. And sometimes, like in the 50s, you know, there was huge, almost like revival times, like nine people coming forward at one communion and eight at another and so on.

And then you'd have several years where maybe nobody came. And then just one or two, perhaps. But when you added them all together and spread the average across the century and a bit, the average, believe it or not, in that tiny congregation was one soul per year professing new faith in their Lord and Saviour.

One per year. Throughout the course of that century and a bit. Now, that's not counting certificates and transfers from other congregations.

[ 27 : 15 ] This is fresh new professions of faith. And that's what it amounted to across that century in about one per year. Now, when you think of one soul each year being brought in professing over the course of the 20th century and a little bit more and so on, to me, that's quite an uplifting thought.

And then when you think of bigger congregations or more vibrant congregations, you know, or stronger ones, such as this one, for example, how many more souls will have been brought into the kingdom over a comparable period of time?

My point is this, that in every such case, in every Christian congregation, was undoubtedly, undoubtedly, some of those making bright and sincere professions might in course of time fall away.

Jesus' parables make that clear. Think of the parable of the sower, you know, and some, he'd sprang up quickly and it was thin earth and it sprang really, oh, hopeful, exciting new growth, but it withered away.

And that happens sometimes with some of those of whom one has the greatest hopes. We all know this. In every congregation, there are such examples and such instances. So this is what Jesus teaches in his parables.

[ 28 : 31 ] And others, you know, the birds of the air take them away or the weeds go up with it and they choke it, but some falls on good soil. And there are those who will, many, who would remain faithful to the end.

For the church on earth and every congregation of it, the day will come when the last soul that was predestined to believe and be saved through the work and ministry and witness of that congregation will have been gathered in.

And though they may yet shine on for a while as a witness to the dark, unbelieving world, their work here will be essentially finished.

Because the last soul that was going to be saved through their witness and administration will have been gathered in. But this is why the lamp was lit.

Here and in all places where it has shone, this is why it was lit. To be a witness and an instrument of bringing souls to Christ.

[ 29 : 44 ] Now, all such lights and lamps that are lit is only ever going to be for a time. Because this world is only for a time.

You've got your power cut scenario, you've got your lights burning in the kitchen or the living room or whatever rooms you've got. Even if you sit up all night in one of those rooms where your candles burning and your lamps going, eventually the dark time comes when you open the curtains and a light floods in the window and you can put out your lamps.

You don't actually need them anymore because a greater light has come. A daylight has arrived. You don't need those lamps anymore.

And the day will come when a light shining in this dark world will have fulfilled its purpose and the souls that were meant to be gathered into this congregation or that congregation or another denomination or a different badge will all have been brought in and the last such soul will have been brought safely in and have professed their redemption and the reason then for that lamp to have been lit will be complete.

And it will shine on for a week while and it will go on but its work will be essentially finished. And that's not a bad thing necessarily but it does just mean that that's all they were going to do but it's done until the greater life comes until the great new morning when nobody needs a lamp anymore.

[ 31 : 17 ] But this is why the lamp was lit. Here and in all places where it has shone to be a witness and an instrument of bringing souls to Christ.

Christ. So have we completed our task? As our American friends would say are we done here? Is the candle of your individual heart finished its work?

Is the candle of our congregation finished its work? I trust not. And there are so many as yet unsaved.

so much work still to do and the night cometh when no man can work. As John tells us chapter 9 verse 4 the message to Ephesus is a message to each one of us individually and collectively.

This is what the Lord says to Ephesus I know thy works and thy labour and thy patience and how thou canst not bear them which are evil and thou hast tried them which say thee are apostles and are not and hast found them liant and hast borne and hast patience and for my name's sake hast laboured and hast not found it nevertheless I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love.

[ 32 : 36 ] Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen and repent and do the first works or else I will come unto thee quickly and will remove thy candlestick out of his place except thou repent.



now what does that say to us? If you're saying oh wait a minute though you're saying that the light has to shine and the last soul's gathered in and surely there's still souls to gather in God's not going to put out our candlestick here because we're still needed God doesn't actually need any of us he can do his work without us it's only humanly speaking that we are the channels that bring in particular souls if we have sins that we refuse to repent of then the candlestick will be taken out of its place the lamp will be snuffed out and those whom the Lord was going to say you know jolly well saved by some other means and some other person or some other congregation and it is we who will be the losers we who will have the time cut short instead of being all that we are able to be for as long as we are able to be and to shine as brightly as we are able to do what is needed repentance toward God faith toward Christ love toward the

Lord and our fellow women remember therefore from whence thou art fallen and repent and do the first works on else I will come unto thee quickly and will remove thy candlestick out of his place except thou repent Proverbs tells us remember the lamp of the wicked shall be put out and even for the faithful when their work is done and complete the need for their candlestick will be over for us let us pray it is not yet for surely all are not yet gathered in there is yet work to do for the master's table must be filled and yet there is room we need every lamp we can get none of us can afford to lose or to leave our first love none of us can afford to have our lamp put out let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father which is in heaven

Jesus said neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel but on a candlestick and it give it light unto all that are in the house high yes yes do it everything god get get your ■■■ people think Ooh have a true and see soon