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The Days of Darkness are Many

Sermon preached by Mr J W Walder at Galeed Chapel Brighton on 1st October 1986

“..yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many.”

Ecclesiastes 11:8

None can possibly and truly appreciate the light but those who have been given a measurable experience of it and its precious and blessed effects in the heart, upon the soul, and in the life. It is unspeakably better to be a true believer who is walking in darkness and has no light to his feelings, than to be a false professor who walks in true darkness but supposedly in the sparks of his own kindling, for the light that all such possess is darkness, double darkness, dreadful darkness. It will be, then, a most wonderful mercy if the true light has shined upon us and if Christ, who declares himself to be the light of the world, has lightened our hearts so that in our humble measure we have been enabled, and still are able, to walk in the light of his light. Nevertheless of necessity it must be that we should prove that the Word of God is true as declared in our text: ‘the days of darkness ... shall be many.’

In the seventh verse of this chapter, we read another precious truth: “Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.” But in the experience of the people of God, how seldom it is that they are really privileged and favoured to walk in the sweet influence of the light and warmth of the in-shining of the Sun of Righteousness, the Son of God. If we are to believe what they say, and if that which is expressed in prayer so often is really felt, days of darkness are indeed many.

But this darkness that is in our text and that darkness which is felt and experienced by a true child of God is vitally different to that darkness that the world is in and the darkness that the false and vain professor is in. That is called in God’s Word, in one place, Egyptian darkness, darkness that can be felt, darkness that is totally prevailing and destroying. But, you see, the Israelites had light in their dwellings when darkness reigned throughout the land of Egypt. The Israelites and the Israelites alone had light in their dwellings. (Exodus 10:21-23) So it is still to this day. God’s people, God’s children only, are subject to true light and it is by virtue of their having been lightened by the Light of Life, which is Christ. Christ has shone into their poor hearts as the Light of the World and revealed to them that they have no light to see and feel; that all their natural light is really darkness. The world and the vain professor do not complain of spiritual darkness, they do not mourn and lament over darkness, because they do not feel the effect and influence of it as the child of God does.

If we know anything of darkness in our souls and spirits, how do we feel? How are we affected by it? Is there the motion and influence of grace under this darkness, labouring, looking, longing, waiting, seeking, begging, hoping that this darkness may be dispelled, that light may shine upon our benighted souls? Is there a desire that we might have the precious and sweet benefit of the rays of the Sun of Righteousness once more, which brings not only light, but life and the influence of the Spirit?

Well then, the darkness in our text is not total darkness, it is not Egyptian darkness, it is not the ignorance and the darkness of the world, but darkness which is compatible with that light which in some measure has been experienced, and that light which is sighed for and groaned after, so that one may come to the experience of the perfect day in spiritual matters. Whilst a child of God is in this world and travelling through this wilderness, he cannot expect, upon Scriptural grounds, to be favoured with a great measure of light or a great many of those days which may be called mid-summer days, when the light clearly shines upon his heart and upon his pathway and he is favoured most comfortably to bask in the sweet and comfortable influence of the warmth and light of the in-shining of Christ manifestly. Nay, the days of darkness are many.

They may not be many in the sense of recurring often, but they may continue for a considerable season, so that we know what it is to travel much by night and in a wintery season, bereft of the sweet comfort of the light. We are not bereft of our interest in it, but, my friends, it is impossible for us to

behold things when it is dark. Just a very simple illustration in regard to this experience. We know very well that the sea exists upon the coasts of this town. We know it is there, but if it is absolutely dark, with not a glimmer of light of any kind, we cannot see it. It is there, still there, but we cannot behold it. So it is in spiritual things. That which may have appeared in the past as clear as day, as plain as God can make it and as clear as faith can behold, when darkness comes on we may be full of doubt in regard to it, though we know full well it is there. We cannot keep it, we cannot lay hold of it, it is dark. Those are seasons of deep trial, and deep trials they are to a child of light, when we walk in darkness.

Well, the words of our text do not promise us anything other than this, for God says, 'Yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many.' Let us not then be surprised if, for a greater measure of our pilgrimage, we travel by night and in the dark. Hart speaks of those characters who, whilst privileged and favoured in their beginning, afterwards know much of the darkness of the way:

*Their pardon some receive at first,
And then, compelled to fight,
They feel their latter stages worst,
And travel much by night.*

(Gadsby's 747)

Now this is not to be taken as a mark of the displeasure of God against a poor sinner. Neither is it to be taken as an evidence that he has neither part nor lot nor interest in Christ as the Sun of Righteousness. He may sometimes say, 'If it is so, why am I in such a state and condition as this? So dark as to my feelings, and the darkness seems to increase rather than decrease?' But this is the feeling that causes a person to intensely long for what the Psalmist longed for. He waited for the Lord, he waited for the dawning, he watched for the first glimpse of morning light, hoping and believing that the Sun of Righteousness would arise upon him with healing and light and strength.

But let us proceed a little more in considering this subject of darkness and light, remembering that the days of darkness shall be many.

First let us notice a little the case of those who feel this condition, grievously feel it and the effects of it.

Secondly, what is the reason and the cause of this darkness, and

Thirdly, somewhat of its effects upon our spirits and feelings.

Then try and notice fourthly, the pleadable and comfortable promises of God regarding the relief, deliverance and help, that he will make darkness light, that he will drive away the shadows and that those who know something of these changes in their spiritual experience will, one day, live to see that glorious state and day that is spoken of in God's Word, when "Thy sun shall no more go down;" (Isaiah 60:20) and that glorious place of which it is written, "There shall be no night there." (Revelation 22:5) But there is plenty of darkness here, plenty of darkness now.

1. Now to consider firstly, the initial enlightening of the soul which reveals to us the sense and feeling of our darkness. Let us look at a figure from a literal example. It is not full day all at once, is it? No, the sun begins to rise in the morning and it is very, very feeble at first, but just sufficient light at the dawning for us to begin to discern the outline, the silhouette of all the objects although they are still very much darkened. Gradually the sun rises, light increases and things become more and more clear and plain to us, more and more evident. So the sun rises to its meridian and then gradually it begins to set and darkness comes on again and we can see no better when the sun sets than we could before it rose, until it once again rises and shines upon us. So it is with the changes in the soul.

Now, my friends, the great and important point is this: have we had a dawning in our souls? Has the Sun of Righteousness arisen so that we have begun to perceive in his light? Our darkness and God's light, our badness and his goodness, our ruin and Christ's redemption? Berridge in his quaint way of expressing matters says something like this:

*If once the sun shines upon a soul clear,
He reads the dark lines which sin has writ there;
Begins to discover his colour and make,
And cries, I'm all over as any fiend black.*

(Gadsby's 710)

Light does not create darkness, it makes it manifest; it does not change things, it reveals them as they are; it does not alter anything, it just shines upon the thing so that we see it as it always is. God's light does not make us bad people. We *are* bad people, but when God's light shines we can *see* how bad we are. And when this light shines and reveals the glory of God; we can see the condescension of Jesus Christ, we behold his glory, his beauty and his loveliness. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:6) It is a blessed thing, a most blessed thing, to behold the face of Jesus Christ—his countenance—and the glory of God's love, mercy, joy, pity, kindness, grace and salvation shining forth in the countenance of the dear Redeemer. If we have been blessed with a glimpse of the glory of Christ, if his light has shone into our hearts, we would love to dwell in it and walk in it all our days, particularly when this light has so shone upon our hearts as to reveal our evidences and some precious tokens of a personal interest in Christ and his salvation.

Now if we have ever had that we cannot lose it; but, my friends, we may lose sight of it. When darkness comes on it is impossible for us to behold and see those things which we see and behold in the light; and so alas, the people of God oftentimes go groaning on in the darkness. They cannot see as they would, they cannot perceive as they long to perceive, not for the want of sight, but for the want of light and that precious in-shining.

If darkness has come on, how does it affect us? Is there the evidence of an exercise of grace under these changes? Is there the mourning, the lamenting, the praying, the looking and the waiting for the return of this sweet and precious and needful blessing, the day dawning?

*Dark and cheerless is the morn,
Unaccompanied by thee;
Joyless is the day's return,
Till thy mercy's beams I see.*

(Gadsby's 726)

*Ah! my winter has been long!
Chilled my hopes and stopped my song.*

(Gadsby's 400)

This is no uncommon experience with the people of God. The seasons of darkness are frequent. 'The days of darkness ... shall be many.' I say, this is no point against us; the thing is as to whether we are duly and graciously exercised under it and wait for the Lord's appearing with many supplications and longing desires.

*Saviour divine, diffuse thy light,
To guide my doubtful footsteps right.*

(Gadsby's 331)

*Saviour of sinners, deign to shine
On this benighted soul of mine;
O show my wandering feet the way
That leads to realms of endless day.*

(Gadsby's 945)

These are the living and earnest requests of a child of light who is walking in darkness.

2. Now I want to try and look at the cause of this. What is it that causes the night to come on literally? Is there any change in the sun? Is there any less measure of light, essential light in that glorious orb that lightens the world? Is there any less influence in that created sun which abides in the firmament? No, not the slightest alteration! The sun is just the same whatever the season and whatever the time of day. It may be midnight or midday, the sun is the same. Just so it is spiritually. O, this darkness is not caused by any change in Christ the Sun of Righteousness! There is no change in his essential being, no change in the essential fullness of his wondrous grace, no change whatsoever in his measure or degree of love and kindness and faithfulness and goodness toward his people, no, no change in Christ.

*Did Jesus once upon me shine?
Then Jesus is for ever mine.*

(Gadsby's 339)

No matter how dark I may be, no matter how cold I may feel, no matter how troubled and tried and distressed I may be and feel to be, he is the same, his love is the same. He does not change. O this glorious Sun of Righteousness who is immutable! So then, we must look for the change somewhere else. It is indeed all to do with us. We are the subjects of the change, sometimes light and sometimes dark, sometimes hot and sometimes cold, sometimes a summer season and then a winter season; and what is it that brings about these changes from day to night, from summer to winter? One thing really; that which intervenes, comes in between us and the sun, so that although the sun remains we feel not his sweet beams neither do we enjoy the precious light. The world gets in between.

Spiritually considered there are a few things we may notice which are comprehended by that word 'world.' The world of sin (the world within us), Satan and all the devices of hell (the world infernal), and the world about us with all its influence and barrenness and darkening effect (the world external). When any or all those things intervene and come between our souls and Christ, we are in the dark. Until there is the reviving of our spiritual health and turning again toward the sun we remain in darkness, and until we have a fresh dawning upon our spirit we have no light. This is often the case. Our guilt and sin, the temptations of the adversary, days of adversity, the world and all its influence has such an effect upon us and our spirit that darkness comes. We may be called upon, like Bunyan's good pilgrim, to pass through the valley of the shadow of death. It was night-time when he passed into it, he had no light. How is it in this season when all those things which are compatible with the night are realised in the soul? Literally there are creatures that cannot bear the sunlight. As soon as the sun comes up they hide: they go into their dens and holes and into hiding and they are not heard until the night comes on again. Just so it is with the child of God when in darkness. He hears the noises and the barking and the growls and the sounds of all those things that prey in the night—the wolf, the owl, the bat, the bear and all the creatures that creep forth from their holes and dens in the night season. So it is a season of distress in the heart of a child of God. Troubled with the temptations and the suggestions of the adversary, tossed and troubled with evil thoughts, the creatures of the night that trouble him, these are the days of darkness. How he longs for the Sun of Righteousness to arise, that all these evil things might creep back into their dens and not trouble him as they do in the night season!

This is no mark against a child of God for he cannot possibly, upon any pretext, be numbered among those characters mentioned in the Word of God: "Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." (John 3:19) He is not among them. He does not love darkness rather than light. His evil deeds are a grief to him, he does not love them. He does not love sin, O, he wants to be delivered from it! He is not among those who love darkness rather than light. 'Yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many.'

3. Well then, the day of darkness is to be considered a season of trial and temptation. It produces distress, anxiety, fear, bondage, and a feeling sense of sin, Satan and the world upon the spirit. Darkness is upon him and maybe he is full of confusion and bewilderment and hardly knows what he is or where he is. He feels like Paul did when on the sea in a violent storm, where it says, "When neither sun nor stars in many days appeared." (Acts 27:20) All was darkness, and remember, there was no other means of navigation in those days. They took their bearings by the stars and the heavenly bodies. If there was no sight of stars or moon they did not know where they were. They sought their direction from the stars and they could not proceed until the moon and stars appeared; but in Paul's case they had nothing by which to take their bearings because it was so dark. So it is common with God's people. They have known seasons and times "when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared." (Acts 27:20) The cause then is the intervention of all those things between the soul and the Sun of Righteousness, when we change, circumstances change, and our feelings change.

Not only is the day of darkness dark, but it is also cold. The sun not only gives us light but it gives us warmth as well. Therefore, when there is darkness there must be coldness, and O, the effect upon the spirit! Spiritual coldness, no feeling, the hand of faith frozen, so that we cannot reach it forth, our spiritual

limbs are so affected that we stagger and stumble in the dark and the cold. This is a painful experience to a child of light.

We will go a little further with regard to the effects of those days of darkness which shall be many. It is impossible for us to behold comfortably and assuredly those things which we may have been convinced existed. We knew they were there, but we cannot see them now, so that by reason of this darkness there is no effect upon the spirit of the one who is in this condition, and who is mourning over it and who is distressed by it. This is one effect of these days of darkness of which there shall be many. At such a time we cannot see our signs. They are there, the God given evidences and signs, but we cannot behold them now. This is a very painful thing. There may be something that we have experienced in the past very clearly and very plainly; we felt sure, very sure of it at the time; we had the full assurance that it was of God and embraced it as a true token and evidence of his love and kindness toward us, so that we felt that he had thoughts of kindness toward us. But when we get in the dark we begin to suspect it all. The devil says we imagined it all, it was all emotion, there was nothing in it really, it was only a few comfortable thoughts upon our natural feelings, it was nothing sure and it is all gone now. So we begin to call all into question. Until the sun rises and we can again see plainly our evidences and our signs, we have hard work to believe that we have ever had any. You see, the whole distress is caused by darkness. The evidence is still there. The signs and evidences of life, the understanding, the possession of grace, the tokens of God's mercy and goodness, and our interest in Christ and his finished work, are still all there—but we cannot see them.

Another thing is that we cannot see our way. It may be that more than once we have been privileged and favoured to be taken spiritually upon a little eminence and we have got on to a mountain top for a little while. We have been a little higher than normal and from that little eminence we have been able to perceive the way before us plainly and clearly, the way that leads to everlasting and eternal life and light. Then we had a very comfortable and sweet feeling that we were in the way and that God had set our feet in the way of Zion and that the way was before us. Then the night came on and how we grope and we stumble and flounder in the dark, not knowing our way. Perhaps we are almost too fearful to move lest we should fall into some ditch or quagmire by reason of our darkness. If this be so in the spiritual aspect of it, it becomes us truly to proceed with the utmost caution, listening for the counsel of the Lord. O how comforted was Bunyan's pilgrim when he walked through that dark valley of the shadow of death! He heard the words of one who had passed that way before: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me." (Psalm 23:4) He found he was not alone in the dark, others had passed this way before, and when he came to the end of that dark place full of dangers and temptations, the sun began to rise. He looked back to see the way that he had come, and was amazed, utterly amazed, that he had come safely through all the dangers. The danger was so much greater than he realised when he was walking through the darkness. Some of the dangers he realised, but there were far more than he knew until the light began to shine. Then he was amazed how he was preserved.

There is also an application of this in regard to that pathway in providence in which God often causes his people to walk. What the hymn writer says is quite true:

*For 'tis decreed that most must pass
The darkest paths alone.*

(Gadsby's 308A)

They seldom find a companion. What a wonderful mercy if God be our Guide and Preserver, for the right way so often proves the darkest way. I well remember a person who was in exceeding great difficulty and trouble providentially. This young person said to her mother, 'I do not know what to do.' Her mother said, 'Take the darkest path, my dear.' But she replied, 'They are all dark.' So it is sometimes and this causes the child of God to wait for the Lord to appear. If we walk in the dark spiritually or temporally we need to be cautious. There are many pitfalls, many stumbling blocks, many snares, and many difficulties. We need the utmost caution.

4. May God be pleased then, oftentimes, to fulfil his gracious Word and promise, "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake

them.” (Isaiah 42:16) What a precious word that is, and what a pleadable promise! His own word. My friends, how pleadable that is before a faithful and merciful God if we are among the characters described in the verse, in darkness. If we can plead this before God he has promised to make darkness light, and our crooked things straight, even things which appear so crooked it seems well-nigh impossible that they should be made straight. But he has promised that he will make the crooked straight. Only God can do it: for who can make that straight which he has made crooked? It is God who does both according to the Scriptures. He permits the first and accomplishes the second. If we have rough places, even very rough places, then he has said that he will make the rough places plain. It is his own word, a merciful word, a pleadable word, and he is faithful who has promised. He will fulfil his gracious and precious word. It is hard work to be still in the dark, hard work to be still when oppressed and beset, but it is the best way, to wait for and upon God.

Another thing in regard to the many days of darkness—they shall be *many*, but not *all* darkness. They will be many, but there will be some days of sweet in-shining, when Christ is pleased to shine upon us and in our souls with the sweet dawning of the day. This he has promised. “Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning.” (Hosea 6:3) What a precious word that is! There is an absolute, definite certainty to his dawning upon the soul, “His going forth is prepared as the morning.” What a preparation that is literally, and what a preparation spiritually! I suppose there is not a single person here that has one doubt but that the sun will rise tomorrow morning. We know it will! There is not the slightest doubt about it. So frequent are its risings and goings down, so faithful to what God has promised, and it will continue. We know the exact moment the sun will rise tomorrow, and not only tomorrow but twenty years hence if time continues. It is prepared, it is fixed, and therefore we may look with the utmost confidence for its rising and we shall not be disappointed. It will rise certainly with regard to the created sun, but it is just as certain, or more certain, with regard to the Sun of Righteousness. He will arise in his appointed time, without fail, and those that look for him shall not be disappointed. My friends, upon the ground of his own promise we may look continually for him to arise in our poor souls if we are among those who sit in darkness, walk in darkness, and mourn and grieve over it and wait for his appearing. He will appear: “But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings.” (Malachi 4:2)

The Psalmist David bitterly complained regarding his dark heart, the days of temptation, and the days of darkness. He speaks of his days of temptation, trials, difficulties, sins, guilt, the reproaches of the enemy, being cast down in his soul. “My soul is cast down within me ...” he says, “Yet the Lord will command his lovingkindness in the day-time.” (Psalm 42:6, 8) Such was the expression of David’s confidence in the Lord’s appearing.

Well then, the Word of God is full of comfortable and encouraging promises notwithstanding the gloomy appearance of the words of our text. ‘Yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many’—yet there is the promise of light, the promise of the dawning of the day, the promise of the return of the Sun of Righteousness, the promise that the Lord will appear unto and for his people. Immediately he is pleased to shine, all their darkness will be driven away, for darkness flees before the light of the sun. When the sun rises everything will be made plain and clear, our evidences will shine and our way will appear as clear as day. The way that the Lord will have us to proceed will be as plain as the light when he shines.

May those then who are now experiencing the days of darkness be enabled to wait with a measure of expectation and credulity for the Lord to appear in his sovereign and appointed time and way.

Now the end. O my friends, if we know anything of the light, if we know anything of those days of darkness, days of night, summer and winter, then we are the Lord’s people, for he says: “Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.” (Psalm 55:19) God’s people have their changes and they do fear him and wait for him. If we are among such, what a glorious day is before us! What a prospect, what a prospect! O to arrive at that city above where the Lamb is the light thereof! “And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.” (Revelation 22:23) O that glorious Sun of Righteousness! “Their sun shall no more go down, neither shall there be any night there,” but a glorious, eternal day! May we know what it is to have a precious token of our interest in it—some precious proof that God has prepared for us this city, which

Bunyan calls the Celestial City. Who can understand the glorious light in which the inhabitants for ever dwell, and the happiness of those who dwell in that light and who behold the face of the Lord Jesus Christ to all eternity!

May we be found among those who are worthy to enter through the gates into the city and for ever dwell in the light of the Sun of Righteousness.

The Lord grant it, for his name's sake.

Amen.

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