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La P 12

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mon preached by Mr. O. Pack at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Monday evening 27.5.72

Hymns 369, 372, 1138

Reading: Isaiah 6 and Haggai 1

Text: 1 John 1.5-7

"This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin".

This Scripture first came to one's mind several days ago when thinking of your pastor's ministry among you as a people, and among the denomination, and of his anniversary here today; and one felt in the first place this to be very expressive of his labours in this place particularly, and also throughout the denomination during these many years in which God has upheld and blessed him as a minister of the Lord of Hosts. I would like you to bear that thought in mind as I try to speak a little from this text. I have read it, not feeling confident that it applies to myself, the Lord knows that I wish I could, but I do feel it applies to our dear friend and felt it so particularly this afternoon.

As you notice there is a connection between this text and those two solemn portions which we read together, especially the one from Isaiah, concerning that never to be forgotten year in his experience when king Uzziah died in which he had been given a sight of the glory and holiness and majesty of God and in the light of which he saw himself a poor, wretched sinner like ourselves, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts". That is the first effect in a poor sinner's heart in a greater or lesser degree of a sight of the glory and majesty of God, in whatever manner He is pleased to give that sight when He first quickens a poor sinner into life. When He says to a poor sinner, "Let there be light", there is light and

the new creation's work begins from that moment in that sinner's soul, and the first effect of that is to convince of sin. The message was a very solemn one Isaiah had to deliver, it was some hundreds of years before the one that Haggai delivered, it was warning the Jews of a solemn scattering time which eventually came. Haggai's message was many years after that scattering time had been accomplished and the Lord had gathered His people in fulfilment, or at least partially so, of the prophecy of Jeremiah where he said, "He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock". Both were solemn messages but towards the end of Haggai's message there was a blessed ray of hope, the assurance that the Lord would be with them and that He would come to that house which was to be built for His name. We find just the same truths in this epistle of John though set forth in a different way and in the light of the succeeding Gospel days to which we have just referred, and here we find the blessed Apostle John speaking of the Lord Jesus under the impersonal pronouns of "that" and "which" and "it". It seems quite unusual but it clearly shows that this "That" and "Which" and "It" used in the first two verses refer to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God Incarnate.

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; "For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us"; then he repeats the same truth, and he was a witness of this truth and therefore he could speak with authority. "These things write we unto you that your joy may be full", these things concerning the Word of eternal life, that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us. "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you". God still uses His ministers and will do until the end of time because His infinite wisdom has appointed that faith should come by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. However literate the world may become and capable of reading for themselves I believe that since

God has appointed the ministry of the Gospel He will use it to the end of time, primarily for the ingathering of His dear people and building them up upon their most holy faith and, what is described in the Epistle to the Ephesians as "for the perfecting of the saints". "This is the message which we have heard of him and declare unto you" and I believe however humble God's servants may be, however illiterate they may be, unlettered, yet this distinguishing mark will always attend a God sent ministry, there will be a divine authority in it. I shall never forget many years ago in my late teens sitting in Shovers Green Chapel one Whit Monday listening to the late Mr. John Gosden preaching, and I knew but little in those days, I said to myself as that good man preached, "O what heavenly authority".

God gives His ministers a message and the text we have read tonight really contains the whole of that message condensed into a few words. I think these few words in the text comprise the whole of the ministry of your dear pastor. He has for years been seeking to set forth from the Word of God the holiness, the greatness, the majesty, the infinite purity of that great God Who is our Creator and against Whom we have sinned, to Whom we are accountable not only for our words and actions but for our thoughts, and before Whom we must stand; warning sinners as Paul says concerning his preaching, "warning every man, and teaching every man; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus". He has warned sinners of their solemn state and condition before this great, holy, heart searching, rein trying God of their responsibilities as well as their helplessness to contribute aught to their own salvation. He has also cast up the way of salvation and sought to exalt Christ which is in this text, He Who is the sum and substance of the Gospel of God.

"This is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all". God the Father is essential light, God the Son is essential light, God the Holy Ghost is essential light; the glorious Trinity in unity is essential light and dwelling in that light into which no

man can approach, whom no man hath seen nor can see. O the holiness, the majesty, the glory of God, light in all His glorious perfections and attributes, "this then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all", but in this particular place John by the blessed Spirit sets before us particularly the Son of God, the Word of Life, in Whom "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily", He Who is the brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of His Person and as spoken of by Paul in another place as the image of the invisible God. No man hath seen God at any time apart from Jesus Christ. God is a Spirit but in Christ Jesus that blessed Man, that real Man, the second Person in the glorious Trinity Who took our nature into indissoluble union with His divine nature all the rays of the light of the glory of God are both concentrated and at the same time exceedingly magnified. An amazing truth, wonderful truth, blessed truth that that great God of Whom we could have had no saving knowledge apart from Christ, all His glories are concentrated in that dear Man, that dear Babe of Bethlehem, the Friend and Saviour of poor lost sinners. Whilst they are concentrated in that lowly, humble Man, despised and rejected of men, set at nought, yet at the same time the glory of God is exceedingly magnified in Christ, a wonderful term, the blessed Spirit uses repeatedly in Holy Scripture concerning the things of God, as being magnified. This is a term that has struck my mind more this last year or two than formerly. You know when you magnify any object with a microscope, or an ordinary magnifying glass or telescope you do not increase the size of that object, God is incapable of increase, He is unchangeable yet in His glorious Gospel and in the Son of His love He is magnified and will be to eternity. "O magnify the Lord with me", said one, let us exalt His name together. Magnified! As in the natural rainbow we see all the constituent colours of light displayed in their glorious hues and yet so wonderfully blended that we cannot discern where one colour begins or another leaves off, so in Christ Jesus the Head of the new covenant, all the glories of God, His perfections

are seen harmonious. We could not look at the sun without damage to our eyes but we can gaze upon that same light broken down into the rainbow with delight and admiration, so in Christ, of Whom the rainbow is a beautiful type, all the glories of the Godhead are seen. Paul said, "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". Where? Where could we bear it? In His holy law? God is a consuming fire out of Christ, no not in His holy law, though His glory is seen there yet that glory is eclipsed by that glory which excelleth in His dear Son and in the Gospel of His dear Son. It is seen then in the face of Jesus Christ; but we have this Treasure, - and O what treasure it is - in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us".

"This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all". Some of you know this God, He has shone into your heart, first it may be in the light of His holy, broken law, and He has convicted us of our sin and ruin and this is the same effect that Isaiah felt when he saw God's glory, but an angel with a live coal from off the altar; beautiful type of the merits of Christ's atoning death, was sent to touch his lips and purge his iniquity, then how ready he was to run as God's messenger to declare all he had heard, and though for the most part the Gospel was a savour of death unto death to those who heard it, it was, as in every age, a savour of life unto life unto others. But Isaiah was discouraged at the prospect of only preaching to harden people's hearts, and he said, "How long?", must this go on for ever, are these to be the only effects of preaching? "But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof", - "a remnant according to the eletion of grace" who shall savingly hear and believe. In the first chapter of John's Gospel we read, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth".

Not in His outward appearance, He was a poor despised man, His visage was more marred than any man's, burdened, oppressed, "I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished", a weary man, a poor man, a hungry man, a tempted man; despised and rejected and yet in that glorious Man, that wondrous Man, the disciples said, "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth". Just that same sight that poor Scottish Yeddie had at his first and last communion when he said, "Yon lovely Man". How expressive, how beautiful. I remember how I used to love that account in my early days. Why? Because I hoped I also had had a distant glimpse by faith of "yon lovely Man", and in that glorious Man, though humble and despised, had seen all the glories of God, all His perfections meeting and harmonised and displayed in the salvation of poor sinners. He reconciled all things in heaven and in earth. I used to wonder what it was that needed reconciliation in heaven until I trust the Spirit showed me He reconciled God's justice with His mercy, what the dear hymn writer calls those "jarring notes" or conflicting attributes in the salvation of the sinner. The Lord Jesus reconciled all things in heaven and in earth, reconciled poor sinners to God.

"This then is the message which we have heard of Him and declare unto you that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all". The whole of this message is contained in the Word of God, the complete canon of Scripture and there is no revelation outside of it, as the article of the Church of England states that anything that is not to be found within this Holy Book, the Word of God, must be rejected. All truth, all revelation is contained in this wonderful Book. Nothing to be added to it as the closing words of the Revelation say, nothing to be taken from it and the true minister of God will keep, as enabled, to that which is in the Word of God, "to the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to my Word it is because there is no light in them". Has God come to you fellow, dying sinner and said, "Let there be light"? You know the old creation as described in the first chapter of Genesis is a beautiful type of the new creation in a poor sinner's heart,

when old things pass away and behold all things become new, The sinner now sees with new eyes, hears with new ears, understands with a new heart, speaks with a new tongue, walks the ways of Zion. There is not time now to go through the various days work to confirm this, but I believe there is a wonderful analogy between the old creation and the new creation in a sinner's heart.

"This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all".

If you and I know Him we shall know Him in our little measure as Isaiah knew Him, as Haggai knew Him, and as John knew Him.

"If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth". It is necessary to distinguish between the two kinds of darkness we find clearly mentioned in the Scripture. In every case the context clearly clarifies what kind of darkness is referred to, but in my simple way I usually think of these two kinds of darkness we find mentioned in Scripture as the darkness of death and as a living darkness. Your dear Pastor spoke this afternoon of darkness which is not really darkness, because even when you find the people of God in the deepest darkness, experimentally, yet you will find that they will have light to see and know that they are sinners before that holy God; and once the penetrating light of God has shone into a sinner's heart however dark he may become experimentally he can never sink into that darkness of death in which he was born. The darkness in this text is the darkness of death, or at least the darkness of a most solemn backsliding condition before God, but I believe it mostly refers to the darkness of death. God's dear people often walk in darkness but not that darkness they were in by nature, "Who is there among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." A solemn word was pronounced against those that kindled a fire and walked in the light of the sparks which they had kindled, "This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow". The dear Psalmist David and others we find often in the deepest darkness, Look at David in the 43rd. Psalm which is the only example we can mention from the Psalms

this evening, he was evidently in deep darkness was he not, when he cried, "Send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me: let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God". He had light to see and know that God was his exceeding joy when favoured with His presence but he was in deep darkness, midnight darkness. It is people in darkness that feel their need of light, not those that are walking in the light. Look at that good Word in Malachi, "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings". They were walking in darkness and what is more this referred to the darkest watch of the night of this world's history thus far - that long interval of 400 years which was to immediately precede the dawning of the Sun of righteousness. Otherwise it would have been no good news to them to be told that the Sun of righteousness would arise. This is not the same kind of darkness spoken of in the text, "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth", and truly there are thousands, if not millions that do claim that they know God, that they have fellowship with Him, and yet by their works they deny Him, walking contrary to His revealed mind and will in the Gospel, contrary to the holy precepts of the Gospel, and John in this Epistle gives some very solemn examples of such cases in the second chapter, "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now". Yet there are plenty of people who profess to be walking in the light yet manifest hatred to their brethren, how solemn! One thing the love of God will do for a poor sinner, if I know anything of it, if I have ever had a touch of it in the soul, is it will, whilst the power of it lasts, remove all hatred and enmity against our fellow-creatures, from our poor hearts. Hatred there will be of evil, intense hatred of evil, but at such times you will find you can pray for your enemies and those that despitefully use and persecute you. There will be no hatred then, the love of God shed abroad in the heart will kill hatred. That is one solemn example of what we have in the text. How are you walking? Examine yourselves,, do you find hatred, enmity in your heart to any of God's dear people? Solemn mark of walking in darkness, it is

either an evidence of being in total darkness, or in the darkness of a most solemn backsliding condition when the evils of our heart thus get the mastery of us for the time being, and certainly one is not walking in the spirit of the Gospel where hatred or enmity predominate. Christ loved some who were manifestly His enemies. At the time of His crucifixion He prayed for them, "Father forgive them". Stephen said, "Lay not this sin to their charge". We know God heard Christ's prayer and I believe there were some around His cross that day mocking Him, some who may have participated in His crucifixion who He knew He was shedding His blood for, and who on the day of Pentecost when Peter faithfully imputed the crucifixion and death of Christ to them cried out, "Men and brethren what must we do?". But as I believe your pastor said this afternoon we have no stones to throw at such cases. It was our sins that made those nails.

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light". If that light has shone in any measure into our hearts it is the first evidence of that new creation in our soul, "As He is in the light", - though not in the same degree, a very dim measure, for we could not bear the full blaze and glory of the light of the Son of God as He is now enthroned in glory. Look at the effects it had upon this very Apostle in the Isle of Patmos when he saw His glory he fell at his feet as dead until the Lord laid His hand upon him and said, "Fear not; I am the first and the last. I am he that liveth, and was dead and behold I am alive for evermore and have the keys of hell and of death". In our present state we could not bear that full glory; it is a wonderful thing if we see a little of it as in a glass darkly for that will fill our poor souls for the time being; warm our hearts, melt us in repentance, godly sorrow, and self loathing at His gracious feet, but if we walk in the light as He is in the light we shall know much about sin and what sinners we are, and the more intimately we walk with God the more we shall know of what sinners we are. A superficial sense of sin bespeaks very little knowledge of God. Hear what Moses said who talked with God face to face, and who was the meekest man that ever lived, "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance". That is the effect if we walk in this light, it will set our sins, our secret sins, it may be long forgotten sins in the light of God's countenance, we shall bow our heads in shame, cover our heads. Have you ever been lying upon your bed during the quiet watches of the night, having such a sight and sense of yourself as a sinner, that you have covered your face with the bed clothes. I often think of Captain Headley Vicars, some of you may have read his memoirs, when he was mortally wounded and was laid upon the stretcher he said, "Cover my face", and I cannot help but think it was under a sense that he, a sinner, good and gracious man as he was, useful man among the poor soldiers, was about to enter the presence of that holy God.

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light". The more we walk in it, the more this light shines into our heart, the

greater sinners we shall feel to be before God and we shall be crying out, "Woe is me", "O wretched man that I am". "God be merciful to me a sinner". "To Thee I come a sinner great". Sinners who are thus taught by the same blessed Spirit and in whom the light of life has shone will find fellowship with others who walk in the same way. I thought of this when your pastor read that beautiful Psalm, "How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity", that is those in whom the light of God's glory, the light of Christ's glory has shone. Good William Tiptaft said, "Have you ever stood on the same spot of land as the publican, have you a companion in him?". We have many associates in life, but few companions, few with whom we can walk and hold fellowship. I feel the text implies more than fellowship with those who are quickened into life, born again of God and made and kept sensible of their need of Christ. This fellowship is with the blessed Trinity - communion. Your dear pastor was speaking of this, "Thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us". O the closeness of that union! But God says, "Can two walk together except they be agreed". Can God and a sinner walk together except they are brought into agreement with Him as to their sinful state and condition, their helplessness, their wretchedness, and in agreement with Him as to the only way in which He can save poor sinners. O that sweet communion between God and His dear people.

I must hasten to close and the most vital point is before us. "The Blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin". Cleanseth, I like this present tense, cleanseth, not did cleanse or will cleanse, but cleanseth. This fountain - if we walk in the light under a deep sense of our sinnership and guilt and often in darkness of soul as to our state and condition before God, tormented by Satan's cruel temptations and accusations, yet if we walk in the light as He is in the light and cry unto God for mercy in and through the merits of the Lord Jesus, looking to this glorious Person in Whom all the glories of God are concentrated and magnified, then whether the Lord has told us it or not, that precious blood cleanseth us from all sin. Have some of you, perhaps been many years trying to confess your sins and pleading for mercy, for forgiveness through Christ and you say, the Lord has not told me He has forgiven me, He has never brought me into the liberty of the Gospel, but I believe on the authority of the Word of God I can say this friends, if you ever humbly confess, mourn over your sins before God and after Christ, the Lord has cleansed your sins and cleanseth you continually as often as sin defiles; and that is continually, for our very breath is corrupt. Yet as we are brought into agreement with Christ, with God, looking with a single eye to the merits of the dear Son of God, His blessed blood continually cleanseth us and, whatever our fears and doubts may be, we stand before God, without spot and blameless. The time has gone so I must leave the subject here, may the Lord bless it to us and seal something upon our hearts if His blessed will.

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