



“Dealing with Darkness”

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The Bible sometimes uses the word *darkness* as a metaphor for sin and evil. Other times, we think of darkness as a lack of knowledge and understanding of the will of God, such as the Gentiles who lived in darkness in the dispensation before Christ came. But the Bible also uses the term in another way and this type of darkness comes to all of us at one time or another. It has nothing to do with whether or not we believe and trust God or whether we’re a Christian or not. This darkness overtakes us when circumstances invade our lives that often we have little to no control over and we are left feeling confused as to why we’re experiencing these things and how we’re to find our way out of it. Perhaps you are going through a period of darkness in your life right now. Maybe the death of a loved one, maybe a sickness of someone you know, a loved one, or even yourself. Maybe it’s the loss of a job or other circumstances that are hanging over your head today, making you very anxious and troubled. There is a passage in the book of **Isaiah** that should be of great help and comfort to we who are Christians today, and it should also serve as a warning to us—a warning as to what we should NOT do when times of darkness come. This is a prophecy written to the nation of Israel concerning the hope that they were to have in the coming Messiah. There would be many things to unfold in the days to come that would challenge their faith in God and their confidence in His promises. They would not be able to reconcile God’s promise of a Savior with the terrible events that were to come upon them in the meantime. Even though Christ has already come and made Himself known to us today, we sometimes find ourselves in the same position as people have throughout history. If we’re not careful, we fail to trust in God’s promises when circumstances seem to go against us, and things seem to us to be out of control. But the prophet exhorted the nation then and in principle, us today not to make a terrible mistake with our faith when darkness comes. If you’ll really internalize what the prophet is saying here, I promise it will help and comfort you in times of darkness.

Isaiah 50:10-11 “Who is 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. Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with

sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.”

What does this mean? How does the prophet’s admonition to God’s people long ago help us in our times of trouble and darkness today? Our subject today will be *Dealing with Darkness*.

In our text passage, the people are exhorted to place their faith and trust in Jehovah as they go through the veil of darkness and suffering. The servant of the Lord, Isaiah, is prophesying to the people about the Messiah who was to come in the surrounding verses. They were to follow his example in relying on God even as they suffered. That’s one of the most difficult things even for the most devoted followers of Christ to learn to do. Suffering and sorrow—whether it be persecution, sickness, disaster, or simply great loss in life—don’t seem to belong in the life of a true and devoted believer. The fact that such things do often afflict our lives—even the lives of the most holy and devout—is one of the greatest stumbling blocks in the minds of people. They can seriously challenge our faith in God and His word if we allow them to.

But Isaiah says we’re not to allow that to happen. We are not to give in to the temptation to turn away from God and turn somewhere else for answers when trouble comes. He reminds us of some things that can be of help and encouragement to us in our days of distress. First of all, Isaiah tells us that darkness WILL indeed come in the lives of God’s people.

Isaiah 50:10 “Who is 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.”

Wouldn’t it naturally follow that if one is doing the will of God and is in fellowship with God that he would find himself walking in the light? Enjoying God’s favor? We’re inclined to think that way. In some cases, we’ve been conditioned to think that way and to believe that if God really exists and is all-powerful, and if someone loves and obeys God’s will, then everything should just work out and be wonderful all along the way. The more faith you have, the closer you are to God, so the more sunny and pleasant life should be. But that’s not what he says. He says, *...that walketh in darkness, and hath no light*. You see, darkness and discipleship are not mutually exclusive. In some ways, they go hand in hand. Suffering is not always the result of personal sins that one commits, although it CAN be. But suffering is the result of living in a fallen and sin-filled world. Being a Christian may mean that one is forgiven of sin, but it doesn’t take one out of this world where the effects and consequences of the Fall of man are constantly felt. In some regards, following Christ can be the beginning of trouble. Jesus never promised that He would insulate and isolate His people from trials and difficulties. In fact, He told His disciples this:

John 16:33 “...In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

Paul would later say this:

II Timothy 3:12 “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”

We read of Christians in the New Testament getting sick, including Paul, Timothy, and many others. We read of Christians suffering tragedy and loss and all kinds of tribulation. Even Jesus our Lord, the perfect Son of God and Son of Man, faced great difficulty, sorrow, loneliness, and loss within His own earthly

life. In fact, if you go back to the fountainhead of the human family, you'll find that every faithful and devoted servant of God has suffered some type of setback in his/her life. It wasn't all sunshine and roses for God's people.

God allowed every earthly thing that Job held dear to be stripped away from him. He lost his farm, his family, his health—everything about his earthly life suddenly fell apart and left him. His three so-called friends came and did what many today do: they tried to blame Job and his relationship with God. *Oh, Job! If you were right with God, those things wouldn't have happened to you. You must've offended God in some way. He must be meting out some kind of punishment,* they reasoned. But what does the Bible say about Job? It doesn't say that he was a bad man or a wicked man. It says just the opposite.

Job 1:1 “There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed (or shunned) evil.”

What did Isaiah say? One who fears God and obeys His servant sometimes finds himself walking through a period of darkness. It's not a matter of whether bad things will happen—they will. The question is, how does the Christian deal with the darkness when it does come? Isaiah says when it comes, *let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.* What does trust imply? It means that we take God at His word because we believe Him even though we don't understand what's happening or why. If you're feeling bewildered and perplexed by things that are sweeping through your life, perhaps right now, do you know you're in good company? You shouldn't feel like you've somehow missed the point.

A more brilliant theologian never lived than the great apostle Paul. He wrote nearly half of the New Testament. He was incredibly educated. He was as devoted a disciple to Jesus Christ as ever walked the face of the earth. There is not a human being who gave more, spent more, or sacrificed more for Christ than did Paul. He had the theology of redemption down to every *t* crossed and every *i* dotted. Yet he said this:

II Corinthians 4:8 “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;”

That word *perplexed* means *at a mental loss*. Paul says *we do not understand, but we do not despair*. Why? Because like Isaiah admonished the people, Paul feared and obeyed God, but he was walking in darkness. He couldn't understand all the things that were happening, but he didn't despair because he trusted in the name of the Lord and stayed upon God. He is a tremendous example of how we should deal with darkness in our own lives. God wants us to trust Him and we have to learn *how* to trust Him. If we knew and understood everything, would we trust God? The history of God's people shows that the very opposite takes place. Man becomes self-righteous, self-sufficient and excludes God from his life, his decisions, and his affections. That's why when times are good and bank accounts are full, when peace prevails and opportunity abounds, spirituality begins to fade. Trusting God in the darkness, as Isaiah says we are to do, implies that we take God at His word--despite the fact that we don't understand how He will do what He says, but we believe He will. It often necessitates darkness and trouble to learn that lesson. Here is a spiritual discipline that takes place in darkness. Paul learned that.

In **II Corinthians 12**, Paul refers to a wonderful experience that had happened to him fourteen years earlier when God gave him a great vision of Paradise. Paul had an experience that others do not have and then come back to tell about it. But there's something interesting to what Paul concludes from his experience when he took that trip to the third heaven.

II Corinthians 12:7-9 “And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

It takes maturity as a Christian to reach the point where you can *glory in infirmity* and praise God in the darkness, that you can trust Him in the storm. You see, God was disciplining Paul to not rely on himself, to not glory in himself, to not bank upon the experiences that God had allowed him to have. So, He allowed sorrow and affliction to temper and discipline Paul. To serve as a continual reminder of his dependence upon God and his need for God’s grace. So, God uses the dark periods of life to cultivate the relationship of the human to the divine, the creation to the Creator. We would never develop that relationship were it not for those experiences. We must learn to *trust in the name of the Lord* when we cannot apply our human reasoning, understanding, and strength to find our way out of the darkness. It has often been said, *it takes the night to show the stars*. Someone may say, *The stars are really out tonight*. But the stars aren’t really any brighter tonight than they were last night. And they are no greater in number at night than they are at noon. The difference is at noon we can’t see them. Think about this: In the day, you see what you think is a long way away. But really, it isn’t. the clouds are but a few miles above the earth. Even the sky itself is merely the atmosphere that envelops the globe only a relative few miles above us. But at night? Stand outside and look at the canopy of stars tonight and even what you can see with the naked eye is a mind-boggling distance from earth.

Someone said that you may have your brightest thoughts at daytime, but you’ll have your deepest thoughts at night. That is so very true. Isaiah says not only to trust in the name of the Lord, but to also stay upon God. Find God and stay with Him. It means we lean upon God. The word *stay* here is the same word used by the psalmist in the familiar **23rd Psalm** when he says, ***Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me (verse 4)***. The shepherd had his staff to lean upon for strength and stability, and that’s what Isaiah is talking about. That’s what God is teaching us to do. When darkness comes and you can’t see your hand in front of your face, you need to think about this: what else is there to do but trust and lean upon God? What happens to us if we don’t learn to do that? If instead of allowing trials to shape, mold, and define our faith in God, what if we turn to self? What if we doubt God’s word and His promises and turn to our own wisdom and the wisdom of the world? Isaiah has a warning for us.

Isaiah 50:11 “Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.”

When it all goes dark, we scramble to find a light because we don’t like the insecurity, anxiety, and uncertainty of the darkness around us that we cannot see. That’s how we react spiritually to the darkness, too. But the Bible says that is a terrible mistake that will only deal us greater misery. Kindle a fire of your own, walk by the light of that fire, and you will have sorrow from the hand of the Lord. It is better to trust God when you can’t see in the darkness around you than it is to light your own fire to see your way out. It will not solve your problems but compound them.

There is a great Bible example of that very thing. Remember when God told Abram that he and Sarai were to have a son and that He had great plans and great blessings in store for them and for the world through this son? They didn’t understand how this was going to happen. That was a matter of darkness

to them. Time passed and there was no son, and they didn't understand what God was doing. You recall that Sarai hatched a plan to basically help God along. She told Abram to go and be with her handmaiden, Hagar, and conceive a child by her and that way God's promise would be fulfilled.

That may sound like a good plan, but it wasn't. The problem was it wasn't God's plan. Any son born to another woman besides the one God chose would not be the son of promise. But Abram did what Sarai suggested and Ishmael was born. If you know your Bible history and very much about world history, you know that the children of Abraham have been made to lie down in sorrow ever since that time. The same is true in your life if you refuse to trust God in your darkness and you lean instead on your own understanding.

Let me tell you this, my friend. I don't have all the answers and neither do you. I haven't figured out the many mysteries of life and you haven't either. It seems especially unreasonable when one who loves and fears the Lord goes through suffering and tragedy, but God has the answers. He sees it all, from beginning to end. He knows you, He knows the circumstances, He knows the reasons, and He knows the outcome. There is not one thing that surprises or confuses the Lord. It is all within His sovereign control. The question is, will you trust Him who made the universe and holds it in the palm of His hand, whose knowledge is infinite? Or will you foolishly refuse Him and turn to the vain and ignorant thoughts of mere mortal man?

I can promise you this. For the Christian, the darkness will not last. There is no such promise for the person who does not know Jesus. That's the folly of living for self and living in sin. The Bible warns of nothing but eternal darkness for the person who lives in sin and rejects the Savior, and that's an awful prospect. But for the one who trusts God, there is always the promise of a brighter day. There is no circumstance in life that can rob the hope that one has in Christ Jesus. There is always God's promise of a day when there will be no pain, no suffering, no sorrow, no sin, no death. An eternal day. If you back up just a few verses in our text, God says this:

Isaiah 50:3-4 "I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering. The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned."

Within His own wisdom and judgment, God allows things to happen. We don't know the mystery of God's ways, but He allows things to happen as they happen for His reasons. You see, the darkness deepens our faith when we learn in the darkness to trust in God and stay or lean upon Him. There is something interesting about **Psalm 23**, going back to that phrase *staying upon God*. You'll notice that the psalmist is talking to you and me in the beginning.

Psalm 23:1 "<<A Psalm of David.>> The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want."

He is explaining to us who God is. Then a few verses later, he is not talking about God, but he is addressing God.

Psalm 23:4 "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

He is talking to God. When he got into that dark, uncertain, treacherous place where a shepherd would sometimes find himself, he had learned to lean upon God. He was cultivating a relationship with God that he wouldn't have had outside of that dark valley.

Friend, you need the Lord. Maybe the present circumstance in your life, whatever it may be, is telling you that you need the Lord more than ever before. There is nobody and nothing else that will lead you safely through the storms of life but the Lord. Maybe you find yourself in a time of great darkness and perplexity today. Maybe everything around you is falling apart. Isn't it a good time for you to seek His face and learn to trust and depend upon the One who has a master plan for this universe and who holds the whole wide world in His hands? If we can help you find Him and His will for your life as revealed in His word, we want to hear from you today.

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