

MUST WE WALK ALONE?

"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." Isaiah 50:10.

The person who is described in this verse is one that fears the Lord, and obeys the voice of His servant, yet "walketh in darkness and hath no light." To those who have not had a Christian experience it may be quite surprising that a child of light should ever be called on to walk in darkness. It is not an uncommon experience for God's people to be in the shadows. In the darkness of sin and ignorance they no longer walk, but with the darkness of trouble and perplexity they are frequently surrounded. It is probably true that all God's people sometimes are in darkness; some more often than others, and a few seem to have it as their normal experience. It is well to remind ourselves that in all the ages some of God's choicest saints have known what it is to have God's countenance hid from them. This condition is a real test of grace. Many of God's people are in darkness with reference to their temporal circumstances.

The darkness that envelops the child of God may be the result of permitted sin, of carelessness, of worldliness, or of broken fellowship with God. In either case the only hope is to go back to the place where we got wrong, and anew follow the Lord's will. But often the darkness comes apart from failure. Then it is good to remember that others have been this way before us, and that they have come out triumphantly into the light, when God's purpose in the darkness had been accomplished. It is sometimes possible to trace the reason for the shadowing of life. It may be past fault or sorrow which pursues the soul into the present, or some discipline or providence today which obscures the sun. Better still, the very darkness may be to prepare us for some future service. If God allows His saints to walk in the darkness in order to bring others out of it, that should be looked upon as a mark of favor or blessing.

God's Word has a message for every life, regardless of what its duty or test or need may be. No condition of human life comes, but that the Bible has a word to meet the need exactly. For those who are called upon to walk the vale of suffering and sorrow and tears our text has a comforting and encouraging word.

In every congregation there are some sorrowful saints. They do not complain always. In fact, the deepest sorrows, like the deepest joys, are usually silent. "The shallows murmur, but the deeps are dumb." Often a smiling face is but the veil that hides a broken heart, even as beautiful flowers may deck the grave where life's fairest treasure is buried. There is no hint in the Bible that God's people will pass into glory without a wilderness temptation or a Gethsemane sorrow.

This message is not designed to condemn sorrow nor to censure those who find themselves in the valley where the shadows lie, but it is intended to sweeten the cup of which all of us must drink, and to throw a light on the path that leads to the mountain crest. If we have to take a bitter medicine, there is no reason why we should chew the capsule in order to taste its full bitterness. Do not leave the sugar in the bottom of the cup to sweeten the last mouthful, but stir it up so the whole cup is sweetened.

I. The Soul's Darkness.

By darkness is meant that sense of depression, loneliness, and fear with which most of us are familiar.

1. Darkness comes to the best of God's children.

Our text is addressed to those who feared the Lord, and obeyed the voice of His servant. Although God's people were excellent in their characters, they walked in darkness. They were not vile profligates, neither were they open backsliders. If only the wicked were afflicted, we would not be astonished greatly. So deeply is the thought that sin is

the cause of all suffering rooted in our minds that our first question, when some great loss or sorrow overtakes us, is: What have I done that I should be so sorely afflicted? Frequently, when a Christian is seen to be in darkness and trouble and tears, the superficial critic pounces upon him and says: "This trouble comes as the result of some sin." The Word of God is not that cruel. It does not teach that doctrine. Darkness, suffering, and sorrow are not always manifestations of divine displeasure. Whatever may be the purpose of our heavenly Father is sending sorrow into our lives or in permitting it to enter them, He is not seeking to express His displeasure with us. Our Lord has taught us that the pruning of the tree or vine does not mean dissatisfaction with the quality of the fruit, but a desire that it may bring forth more fruit.

2. Darkness may come when God's child is engaged actively in the Lord's service.

When Abraham was standing by the altar a horror of great darkness enwrapped him. Job was coming from the altar where he had been making sacrifice for his children when the tidings came that all of his children had perished. It was when the heart of John was burning with loving zeal for the seven churches of Asia Minor that he was banished to Patmos, but he did more for God on that lonely island than he could have done as the pastor of seven churches.

3. Darkness may become so dense that you cannot see a step before you.

They walk "in darkness and have no light." Did you ever try to count the stars on a dark night? That is not any more impossible than to attempt to count your mercies while passing through a storm of sorrows. Sorrow is a soul sickness, and instead of rebuking us when we sorrow, God asks us to lean heavily upon Him. He has assured us that in all our sorrows and afflictions He is grieved and afflicted, and that if we will but patiently endure he will in due time bring us out into a larger place.

II. The Soul's Danger.

There are some great dangers that beset the soul while passing through the darkness.

1. The danger of thinking that God has forsaken us.

Few souls have passed through the darkness or some great sorrow without having heard Satan say that God had deserted them. God is just as truly with His children in their sorrows as He is with them in their joys; in our adversities as He is in our prosperous days. God wants us to know that He is with us when the storms are raging without. To every one of His troubled children God says: "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee."

2. The danger of thinking that no good can possibly come to us or to anyone else through our afflictions or sufferings.

We look eagerly for the sunshine that is to follow the rain, but we forget the blessings which the showers bestow. The robins sing loudest and sweetest just before the shower. That is because they know that when the rain is over there will be an abundance of food ready for them and their little ones. Pearl divers tell us that the most beautiful gems are found in the deepest waters. The sun has to go down before we can see the stars. Someone has said that in order to appreciate health one must have had at least one severe sickness. Only through hunger can we appreciate a feast. God's greatest revelations come to us in our hours of darkness and sorrow.

3. The danger of trying to kindle fires of our own to light up our way through the darkness.

In our disappointment and discouragement the temptation comes to abandon the house of the Lord for other places and secondary or trivial things. There are few sights that are more sad or pathetic than turning from Christ to the world for consolation and encouragement.

III. The Soul's Deliverance.

What are we to do when the darkness enwraps us, and there does not seem to be any pathway out?

1. Trust in the Lord.

That sounds very simple, but it is one of the most difficult things we ever attempt. It is daring to believe that the raging storm is in the hand of God, and that it is working out for us a purpose of infinite mercy and comfort. It is Job standing in the midst of his slaughtered children and shattered fortune and saying: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him." This is an act of pure faith, and a faith which God never fails to honor.

"When darkness veils his lovely face,
I rest in his unchanging grace;
In every dark and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil.

On Christ the solid rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand."

2. Lean upon the Lord.

Darkness, suffering, and tears furnish an occasion for God to bestow His grace. The Psalmist said, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me."

Time is a great instrument in the hand of God, and if we will just lean upon Him and wait until He sees fit to deliver us from our darkness it will be so much better.

3. Co-operate with the Lord in His great work.

When Elijah was on the verge of despair God gave him a task to perform. When Simon Peter was overwhelmed with regrets for his failures, Christ gave him the task of feeding His sheep and His lambs, and in co-operation with the Lord in this great work he forgot his past sin. If you are discouraged and ready to quit, go out and start doing what the Lord has commanded you to do, and in the doing of it there will come into your heart a sense of God's presence and power and peace. You can glorify God Who has done so much for you by trusting in Him, leaning upon Him for strength, and co-operating with Him in His great work.