

SONGS IN THE NIGHT

"But none saith, Where is God my maker, Who giveth songs in the night?" Job 35:10.

Elihu was a very wise man. He was greatly puzzled about the cause of Job's suffering. He concluded that if men are tried and troubled exceedingly it is because, while they are bemoaning their troubles, they do not say, "Where is God my maker, Who giveth songs in the night?" That is, while they are looking about to see how they may escape their troubles they forget to look to Him from whence all help cometh. But, Elihu's conclusion did not happen to be right in the case of Job.

The world has its night. It seems necessary that it have one. The sun shines during the day, and men go forth to their labors; but they grow weary, and nightfall comes on, like a sweet boon from heaven. The darkness draws the curtains, and shuts out the light, which might prevent our eyes from slumber; while the sweet, calm stillness of the night permits us to rest upon the lap of ease, and there forget awhile our cares, until the morning sun appears, touches our eyelids, and bids us rise, and proceed to the labors of the day. Night is one of the grandest blessings that men enjoy; we have many reasons to thank God for it. Yet night is to many a gloomy season. We cannot see and do as we can in the bright and cheerful light of day. Night is the season of terror and alarm to many.

Yet, man must have his night. And many nights do we have -- nights of anxiety, bewilderment, ignorance, doubt, oppression, persecution, suffering and sorrow --- nights of all kinds which press upon our spirits and terrify our souls.

But it is not to singing in the natural night that Elihu here refers. It is evident that "night" is here used as a symbol of affliction and suffering. The appropriateness of the symbol commends itself at once to our minds, for, though the shades of night are a relief to some from toil and labor they bring to many an increase of toil and suffering. There is an untold relief in light. While suffering and sorrow continue just the same, light seems to reanimate hope and endurance. Darkness has the opposite effect. The greatest inward conflicts take place during its long hours -- sickness is doubly weary and full of uneasiness. The unclosed eyes, the unsubdued pain, the voice of sympathy hushed, all these test the patience of a Christian and make him recoil from the night season. Thus night is a fitting symbol of trial. If you are a Christian, you need no proof that Christian people have nights.

I. The Surprise.

Our text provides a surprise, namely, that it is possible to have songs in the nights of trial. We would expect the very opposite to be true. One sweet and solemn voice said, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." There we seem to have the words set in right sequence -- weeping and night; joy and morning. That is the way we would expect it. Yet, Elihu will have it the other way; difficulty in the daytime, songs in the night.

"Songs" and "night" are words that appear to have no reciprocal relationship. But human experience is larger than human definitions. It is true to the experience of mankind that while there has been a night the night has been made alive with divine music. Who will deny this? Certainly no man who has fully experienced life with its tragedy, its changeful experience, now joyous to ecstasy, then sad to despair. Who has not felt the presence of the Lord at the graveside?

Yes, singing in the night, though surprising, is a reality. Some of God's choicest children travel most of the way to heaven by "night." George Matheson, though blind, preached on through life with a seraphic zeal. Fanny Crosby saw through blind eyes the glory of the King, and her songs set the people of God around the world singing. The ministry of Robert Hall, who had to live out his life in a suffering body, translated itself into a song of hope throughout England, and beyond. Elizabeth Barrett Browning sang from her bed of invalidism songs of hope and cheer that have comforted and inspired aching hearts around the world. Paul and Silas, with bleeding backs and manacled limbs, made the walls of their Philippian prison vibrate with song. It was one of the most triumphant moments of New Testament Christianity. It shows what faith in Christ will do for us in our dark experiences. To sing in a dungeon and at midnight, when happiness is a victory and cheerfulness a miracle, that is the special gift and grace of Christianity. And then the martyrs, a noble army of Christ's victors, sang amid the flames that consumed their bodies, songs of praises to God that He counted them worthy of the martyr's crown.

II. The Source.

It is easy to sing when we can read the notes by daylight, but the skillful singer is the one who can sing when there is not a ray of light to read by, who sings from his heart, and not from a book that he can see, because he has no means of reading, save from that inward book in his own spirit, whence notes of gratitude pour out in songs of praise. No man can produce a song in the night by himself. Songs in the night come only from God.

God helps people to sing. He makes it possible for those who trust in Him to sing in the night. He enables them to face with fortitude and courage bitter trials which, were it not for His help, would be too heavy to bear. He takes away the spirit of heaviness and gives the garment of praise.

In this respect our Lord set the example. He was usually glad and joyous. Preceding His arrest in Gethsemane Jesus gathered His disciples together and in the darkness of those awful hours He asked them to sing a hymn. From that day until this He has taught His followers to sing in darkness. When Catherine Booth was dying with cancer in her throat, and unable to speak, friends asked her if there was any hymn she wished them to sing. She wrote on a slate, "Sing 'My Jesus I love Thee, I know Thou art mine!'" God is the only One who inspires songs in the night, and He is the only One about Whom we can sing in the night.

III. The Sequel.

1. Songs in the night will cheer us.

There is nothing like singing to keep your spirits up. Martin Luther said, "The devil cannot bear singing." He does not like Christian music. You will recall that when an evil spirit rested upon Saul that David played on his harp and the evil spirit went away from him. Singing is one of the best things to purify our minds of evil thoughts and to drive away our fears.

2. They will cheer others.

A Christian worker lay awake all night perplexed over a matter of guidance. In the early hours of the morning he heard a milk man rumble by in his wagon whistling the hymn, "Trust and Obey." The tune suggested the words,

"Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."

It was a message to his soul, and he decided to obey God and to take His way out of his problem. It is doubtful if that milk man ever knew that a poor baffled child of God heard him whistling a song of Zion; yet, by whistling the tune, he did God a great service and cheered his fellowman. And so it is with you, Christian. When you are in trouble, sing; you do not know who is near and will hear you. Many may be cheered by your song.

3. They will please God.

God loves to hear His people sing in the night. At no time does He delight to hear His people sing as much as when they give Him a serenade of praise under His window when He has hidden His face from them.

You, too, can be a songbird in one of God's gilded cages. We may never be in stone prisons like Paul and Silas were, but often we are in stronger and darker prisons of the soul's despair, the heart's necessity, the life's keen hunger, the cold so bitter that it chills our inmost life. In these prisons of trial and affliction we can get beyond murmuring to where we can sing praises to our Christ. We can be like Paul and Silas: we can be "Midnight Singing-Christians." We can be Christians who turn the night into day.

We can all be preachers --- not in pulpits -- but we can preach by singing as did Paul and Silas. And we shall have an audience, for of Paul and Silas it is written, "and the prisoners were listening." The world is bound to listen to saints singing at midnight in the jail of difficulty. They may not care a bit about your testimony and preaching otherwise, but they will listen when you preach by singing songs in the night. God will give His saints the songs of faith, tranquillity, sympathy, courage, hope, assurance and heavenly anticipation.