

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE THREE HOURS' DARKNESS.

A Sermon

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"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour."
—Matthew xxvii. 45.

FROM nine till noon the usual degree of light was present ; so that there was time enough for our Lord's adversaries to behold and insult his sufferings. There could be no mistake about the fact that he was really nailed to the cross ; for he was crucified in broad daylight. We are fully assured that it was Jesus of Nazareth, for both friends and foes were eye-witnesses of his agonies : for three long hours the Jews sat down and watched him on the cross, making jests of his miseries. I feel thankful for those three hours of light ; for else the enemies of our faith would have questioned whether in very deed the blessed body of our Master was nailed to the tree, and would have started fancies as many as the bats and owls which haunt the darkness. Where would have been the witnesses of this solemn scene if the sun had been hidden from morn till night ? As three hours of light gave opportunity for inspection and witness-bearing, we see the wisdom which did not allow it to close too soon.

Never forget that this miracle of the closing of the eye of day at high noon was performed by our Lord in his weakness. He had walked the sea, and raised the dead, and healed the sick, in the days of his strength ; but now he has come to his lowest, the fever is on him, he is faint and thirsty. He hangs on the borders of dissolution ; yet has he power to darken the sun at noon. He is still very God of very God :

"Behold, a purple torrent run
Down from his hands and head,
The crimson tide puts out the sun ;
His groans awake the dead."

If he can do this in his weakness, what is he not able to do in his strength ? Fail not to remember that this power was displayed in a sphere in which he did not usually put forth his might. The sphere of Christ is that of goodness and benevolence, and consequently of light. When he enters the sphere of darkness-making, and of working judgment, he engages in what he calls his strange work. Wonders of terror are his left-handed deeds. It is but now and then that he causes the sun to go down at noon, and darkens the earth in the clear day (Amos viii. 9). If our Lord can

make darkness at will as he dies, what glory may we not expect now that he lives to be the light of the city of God for ever? The Lamb is the light; and what a light! The heavens bear the impress of his dying power, and lose their brightness; shall not the new heavens and the new earth attest the power of the risen Lord? The thick darkness around the dying Christ is the robe of the Omnipotent: he liveth again, all power is in his hands, and all that power he will put forth to bless his chosen.

What a call must that mid-day midnight have been to the careless sons of men! They knew not that the Son of God was among them; nor that he was working out human redemption. The grandest hour in all history seemed likely to pass by unheeded, when, suddenly, night hastened from her chambers and usurped the day. Every one asked his fellow, "What means this darkness?" Business stood still: the plough stayed in mid-furrow, and the axe paused uplifted. It was the middle of the day, when men are busiest; but they made a general pause. Not only on Calvary, but on every hill, and in every valley, the gloom settled down. There was a halt in the caravan of life. None could move unless they groped their way like the blind. The master of the house called for a light at noon, and his servant tremblingly obeyed the unusual summons. Other lights were twinkling, and Jerusalem was as a city by night, only men were not in their beds. How startled were mankind! Around the great death-bed an appropriate quiet was secured. I doubt not that a shuddering awe came over the masses of the people, and the thoughtful foresaw terrible things. Those who had stood about the cross, and had dared to insult the majesty of Jesus, were paralyzed with fear. They ceased their ribaldry, and with it their cruel exultation. They were cowed though not convinced, even the basest of them; while the better sort "smote their breasts and returned." As many as could do so, no doubt, stumbled to their chambers, and endeavoured to hide themselves, for fear of awful judgments which they feared were near. I do not wonder that there should be traditions of strange things that were said during the hush of that darkness. Those whispers of the past may or may not be true: they have been the subject of learned controversy, but the labour of the dispute was energy ill spent. Yet we could not have wondered if one did say as he is reported to have done, "God is suffering, or the world is perishing." Nor should I drive from my beliefs the poetic legend that an Egyptian pilot passing down the river heard among the reedy banks a voice out of the rustling rushes, whispering, "The great Pan is dead." Truly, the God of nature was expiring, and things less tender than the reeds by the river might well tremble at the sound thereof.

We are told that this darkness was over all the land; and Luke puts it, "over all the earth." That portion of our globe which was then veiled in natural night was not affected thereby; but to all men awake, and at their employment, it was the advertisement of a great and solemn event. It was strange beyond all experience, and all men marvelled; for when the light should have been brightest, all things were obscured for the space of three hours.

There must be great teaching in this darkness; for when we come so near the cross, which is the centre of history, every event is full of meaning.

Light will come out of this darkness. I love to feel the solemnity of the three hours of death-shade, and to sit down therein and meditate, with no companion but the august sufferer, around whom that darkness lowered. I am going to speak of it in four ways, as the Holy Spirit may help me. First, let us bow our spirits in the presence of *a miracle which amazes us*; secondly, let us regard this darkness as *a veil which conceals*; thirdly, as *a symbol which instructs*; and fourthly, as *a display of sympathy*, which forewarns us by the prophecies which it implies.

I. First, let us view this darkness as A MIRACLE WHICH AMAZES US.

It may seem a trite observation that this darkness was altogether out of the natural course of things. Since the world began was it not heard that at high noon there should be darkness over all the land. It was out of the order of nature altogether. Some deny miracles; and if they also deny God, I will not at this time deal with them. But it is very strange that any one who believes in God should doubt the possibility of miracles. It seems to me that, granted the being of a God, miracle is to be expected as an occasional declaration of his independent and active will. He may make certain rules for his actions, and it may be his wisdom to keep to them; but surely he must reserve to himself the liberty to depart from his own laws, or else he has in a measure laid aside his personal Godhead, deified law, and set it up above himself. It would not increase our idea of the glory of his Godhead if we could be assured that he had made himself subject to rule, and tied his own hands from ever acting except in a certain manner. From the self-existence and freedom of will which enter into our very conception of God, we are led to expect that sometimes he should not keep to the methods which he follows as his general rule. This has led to the universal conviction that miracle is a proof of Godhead. The general works of creation and providence are to my mind the best proofs; but the common heart of our race, for some reason or other, looks to miracle as surer evidence; thus proving that miracle is expected of God. Although the Lord makes it his order that there shall be day and night, he in this case with abundant reason interposes three hours of night in the centre of a day. Behold the reason. The unusual in lower nature is made to consort with the unusual in the dealings of nature's Lord. Certainly this miracle was most congruous with that greater miracle which was happening in the death of Christ. Was not the Lord himself departing from all common ways? Was he not doing that which had never been done from the beginning, and would never be done again? That man should die is so common a thing as to be deemed inevitable. We are not startled now at the sound of a funeral knell: we have become familiar with the grave. As the companions of our youth die at our side we are not seized with amazement; for death is everywhere about us and within us. But that the Son of God should die, this is beyond all expectation, and not only above nature, but contrary thereto. He who is equal with God deigns to hang upon the cross, and die. I know of nothing that seems more out of rule and beyond expectation than this. The sun darkened at noon is a fit accompaniment of the death of Jesus. Is it not so?

Further, this miracle was not only out of the order of nature, but it was one which *would have been pronounced impossible*. It is not possible

that there should be an eclipse of the sun at the time of the full moon. The moon at the time when she is in her full is not in a position in which she could possibly cast her shadow upon the earth. The Passover was at the time of the full moon, and therefore it was not possible that the sun should then undergo an eclipse. This darkening of the sun was not strictly an astronomical eclipse; the darkness was doubtless produced in some other way: yet to those who were present it did seem to be a total eclipse of the sun—a thing impossible. Ah, brothers! when we come to deal with man, and the fall, and sin, and God, and Christ, and the atonement, we are at home with impossibilities. We have now reached a region where prodigies, and marvels, and surprises, are the order of the day: sublimities become commonplaces when we come within the circle of eternal love. Yea, more; we have now quitted the solid land of the possible, and have put out to sea, where we see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. When we think of impossibilities in other spheres we start back; but the way of the cross is ablaze with the divine, and we soon perceive that “with God all things are possible.” See, then, in the death of Jesus, the possibility of the impossible! Behold here how the Son of God can die. We sometimes pause when we meet with an expression in a hymn which implies that God can suffer or die; we think that the poet has used too great a license: yet it behoves us to refrain from hypercriticism, since in Holy Writ there are words like it. We even read (Acts xx. 28) of “the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood”—the blood of God! Ah well! I am not careful to defend the language of the Holy Ghost; but in its presence I take liberty to justify the words which we sang just now:

“Well might the sun in darkness hide,
And shut his glories in,
When God, the mighty Maker, died
For man, the creature’s sin.”

I will not venture to explain the death of the incarnate God. I am content to believe it, and to rest my hope upon it.

How should the Holy One have sin laid upon him? That also I do not know. A wise man has told us, as if it were an axiom, that the imputation or the non-imputation of sin is an impossibility. Be it so: we have become familiar with such things since we have beheld the cross. Things which men call absurdities have become foundation truths to us. The doctrine of the cross is to them that perish foolishness. We do know that in our Lord was no sin, and yet he his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree. We do not know how the innocent Son of God could be permitted to suffer for sins that were not his own; it amazes us that justice should permit one so perfectly holy to be forsaken of his God, and to cry out, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” But it was so; and it was so by the decree of the highest justice; and we rejoice therein. As it was so, that the sun was eclipsed when it was impossible that he should be eclipsed, so has Jesus performed on our behalf, in the agonies of his death, things which, in the ordinary judgment of men, must be set down as utterly impossible. Our faith is at home in wonder-land, where the Lord’s thoughts are seen to be as high above our thoughts as the heavens are above the earth.

Concerning this miracle, I have also further to remark that *this darkening of the sun surpassed all ordinary and natural eclipses*. It lasted longer than an ordinary eclipse, and it came in a different manner. According to Luke, the darkness all over the land came first, and the sun was darkened afterwards: the darkness did not begin with the sun, but mastered the sun. It was unique and supernatural. Now, among all griefs no grief is comparable to the grief of Jesus: of all woes none can parallel the woes of our great Substitute. As strongest light casts deepest shade, so has the surprising love of Jesus cost him a death such as falls not to the common lot of men. Others die, but this man is "obedient unto death." Others drink the fatal draught, yet reckon not of its wormwood and gall; but he "tasted death." "He poured out his soul unto death." Every part of his being was darkened with that extraordinary death-shade; and the natural darkness outside of him did but shroud a special death which was entirely by itself.

And now, when I come to think of it, *this darkness appears to have been most natural and fitting*. If we had to write out the story of our Lord's death we could not omit the darkness without neglecting a most important item. The darkness seems a part of the natural furniture of that great transaction. Read the story through and you are not at all startled with the darkness; after once familiarizing your mind with the thought that this is the Son of God, and that he stretches his hands to the cruel death of the cross, you do not wonder at the rending of the veil of the temple; you are not astonished at the earthquake or at the rising of certain of the dead. These are proper attendants of our Lord's passion; and so is the darkness. It drops into its place, it seems as if it could not have been otherwise.

"That sacrifice!—the death of him—
The high and ever Holy One!
Well may the conscious heaven grow dim,
And blacken the beholding sun."

For a moment think again. Has not it appeared as if the death which that darkness shrouded was also a natural part of the great whole? We have grown at last to feel as if the death of the Christ of God were an integral part of human history. You cannot take it out of man's chronicle; can you? Introduce the Fall, and see Paradise Lost, and you cannot make the poem complete till you have introduced that greater Man who did redeem us, and by his death gave us our Paradise Regained. It is a singular characteristic of all true miracles, that though your wonder never ceases they never appear to be unnatural: they are marvellous, but never monstrous. The miracles of Christ dovetail into the general run of human history: we cannot see how the Lord could be on earth and Lazarus not be raised from the dead when the grief of Martha and Mary had told its tale. We cannot see how the disciples could have been tempest-tossed on the Lake of Galilee and the Christ not walk on the water to deliver them. Wonders of power are expected parts of the narrative where Jesus is. Everything fits into its place with surrounding facts. A Romish miracle is always monstrous and devoid of harmony with all beside it. What if St. Winifred's head did come up from the well and

speak from the coping to the astonished peasant who was about to draw water ! I do not care whether it did or did not ; it does not alter history a bit, nor even colour it ; it is tagged on to the record, and is no part of it. But the miracles of Jesus, this of the darkness among them, are essential to human history ; and especially is this so in the case of his death and this great darkness which shrouded it. All things in human story converge to the cross, which seems not to be an after-thought nor an expedient, but the fit and foreordained channel through which love should run to guilty men.

I cannot say more from want of voice, though I had many more things to say. Sit down, and let the thick darkness cover you till you cannot even see the cross, and only know that out of reach of mortal eye your Lord wrought out the redemption of his people. He wrought in silence a miracle of patience and of love, by which light has come to those who sit in darkness and in the valley of the shadow of death.

II. Secondly, I desire you to regard this darkness as A VEIL WHICH CONCEALS. The Christ is hanging on yonder tree. I see the dreadful cross. I can see the thieves on either side. I look around, and I sorrowfully mark that motley group of citizens from Jerusalem, and scribes, and priests, and strangers from different countries, mingled with Roman soldiers. They turn their eyes on him, and for the most part gaze with cruel scorn upon the Holy One who is in the centre. In truth it is an awful sight. Mark those dogs of the common sort and those bulls of Bashan of more notable rank, who all unite to dishonour the meek and lowly One. I must confess I never read the story of the Master's death, knowing what I do of the pain of crucifixion, without deep anguish : crucifixion was a death worthy to have been invented by devils. The pain which it involved was immeasurable ; I will not torture you by describing it. I know dear hearts that cannot read of it without tears, and without lying awake for nights afterwards.

But there was more than anguish upon Calvary : ridicule and contempt embittered all. Those jests, those cruel gibes, those mockeries, those thrustings out of the tongue, what shall we say of these ? At times I have felt some little sympathy with the French Prince who cried, " If I had been there with my guards, I would soon have swept those wretches away." It was too terrible a sight : the pain of the victim was grievous enough, but the abominable wickedness of the mockers who could bear ? Let us thank God that in the middle of the crime there came down a darkness which rendered it impossible for them to go further with it. Jesus must die ; for his pains there must be no alleviation, and from death there must be for him no deliverance ; but the scoffers must be silenced. Most effectually their mouths were closed by the dense darkness which shut them in.

What I see in that veil is, first of all, that it was a *concealment for those guilty enemies*. Did you ever think of that ? It is as if God himself said, " I cannot bear it. I will not see this infamy ! Descend, O veil ! " Down fell the heavy shades.

" I asked the heavens, ' What foe to God hath done
This unexampled deed ? ' The heavens exclaim,
' 'Twas man ; and we in horror snatched the sun
From such a spectacle of guilt and shame.' "

Thank God, the cross is a hiding-place. It furnishes for guilty men a shelter from the all-seeing eye, so that justice need not see and strike. When God lifts up his Son, and makes him visible, he hides the sin of men. He says that "the times of their ignorance he winks at." Even the greatness of their sin he casts behind his back, so that he need not see it, but may indulge his long-suffering, and permit his pity to endure their provocations. It must have grieved the heart of the eternal God to see such wanton cruelty of men towards him who went about doing good, and healing all manner of diseases. It was horrible to see the teachers of the people rejecting him with scorn, the seed of Israel, who ought to have accepted him as their Messiah, casting him out as a thing despised and abhorred. I therefore feel gratitude to God for bidding that darkness cover all the land, and end that shameful scene. I would say to any guilty ones here: Thank God that the Lord Jesus has made it possible for your sins to be hidden more completely than by thick darkness. Thank God that in Christ he does not see you with that stern eye of justice which would involve your destruction. Had not Jesus interposed, whose death you have despised, you had wrought out in your own death the result of your own sin long ago; but for your Lord's sake you are allowed to live as if God did not see you. This long-suffering is meant to bring you to repentance. Will you not come?

But, further, that darkness was *a sacred concealment for the blessed Person of our divine Lord*. So to speak, the angels found for their King a pavilion of thick clouds, in the which his Majesty might be sheltered in its hour of misery. It was too much for wicked eyes to gaze so rudely on that immaculate Person. Had not his enemies stripped him naked, and cast lots upon his vesture? Therefore it was meet that the holy manhood should at length find suitable concealment. It was not fit that brutal eyes should see the lines made upon that blessed form by the graving tool of sorrow. It was not meet that revellers should see the contortions of that sacred frame, indwelt with Deity, while he was being broken beneath the iron rod of divine wrath on our behalf. It was meet that God should cover him, so that none should see all he did and all he bare when he was made sin for us. I bless God devoutly for thus hiding my Lord away: thus was he screened from eyes which were not fit to see the Sun much less to look upon the Sun of Righteousness.

This darkness also warns us, even us who are most reverent. This darkness tells us all that *the Passion is a great mystery, into which we cannot pry*. I try to explain it as substitution, and I feel that where the language of Scripture is explicit, I may and must be explicit too. But yet I feel that the idea of substitution does not cover the whole of the matter, and that no human conception can completely grasp the whole of the dread mystery. It was wrought in darkness, because the full, far-reaching meaning and result cannot be beheld of finite mind. Tell me the death of the Lord Jesus was a grand example of self-sacrifice—I can see *that* and much more. Tell me it was a wondrous obedience to the will of God—I can see *that* and much more. Tell me it was the bearing of what ought to have been borne by myriads of sinners of the human race, as the chastisement of their sin—I can see *that*, and found my best hope upon it. But do not tell me that this is all that is in the cross. No, great as this would be, there is much more

in our Redeemer's death. God only knows the love of God : Christ only knows all that he accomplished when he bowed his head and gave up the ghost. There are common mysteries of nature into which it were irreverence to pry ; but this is a divine mystery, before which we put our shoes from off our feet, for the place called Calvary is holy ground. God veiled the cross in darkness, and in darkness much of its deeper meaning lies ; not because God would not reveal it, but because we have not capacity enough to discern it all. God was manifest in the flesh, and in that human flesh he put away sin by his own sacrifice : this we all know ; but "without controversy great is the mystery of godliness."

Once again, this veil of darkness also pictures to me the way in which *the powers of darkness will always endeavour to conceal the cross of Christ*. We fight with darkness when we try to preach the cross. "This is your hour, and the power of darkness," said Christ ; and I doubt not that the infernal hosts made in that hour a fierce assault upon the spirit of our Lord. Thus much also we know, that if the prince of darkness be anywhere in force, it is sure to be where Christ is lifted up. To becloud the cross is the grand object of the enemy of souls. Did you ever notice it ? These fellows who hate the gospel will let every other doctrine pass muster ; but if the atonement be preached, and the truths which grow out of it, straightway they are aroused. Nothing provokes the devil like the cross. Modern theology has for its main object the obscuration of the doctrine of atonement. These modern cuttle-fishes make the water of life black with their ink. They make out sin to be a trifle, and the punishment of it to be a temporary business ; and thus they degrade the remedy by underrating the disease. We are not ignorant of their devices. Expect, my brethren, that the clouds of darkness will gather as to a centre around the cross, that they may hide it from the sinner's view. But expect this also, that there darkness shall meet its end. Light springeth out of that darkness—the light eternal of the undying Son of God, who having risen from the dead, liveth for ever to scatter the darkness of evil.

III. Now we pass on to speak of this darkness as A SYMBOL WHICH INSTRUCTS.

The veil falls down and conceals ; but at the same time, as an emblem, it reveals. It seems to say, "Attempt not to search within, but learn from the veil itself : it hath cherub work upon it." This darkness teaches us what Jesus suffered : it aids us to guess at the griefs which we may not actually see.

The darkness is the symbol of *the wrath of God which fell on those who slew his only begotten Son*. God was angry, and his frown removed the light of day. Well might he be angry, when sin was murdering his only Son ; when the Jewish husbandmen were saying, "This is the heir ; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance." This is God's wrath towards all mankind, for practically all men concurred in the death of Jesus. That wrath has brought men into darkness ; they are ignorant, blinded, bewildered. They have come to love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. In that darkness they do not repent, but go on to reject the Christ of God. Into this darkness God cannot look upon them in complacency ; but he views

them as children of darkness, and heirs of wrath, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

The symbol also tells us *what our Lord Jesus Christ endured*. The darkness outside of him was the figure of the darkness that was within him. In Gethsemane a thick darkness fell upon our Lord's spirit. He was "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." His joy was communion with God—that joy was gone, and he was in the dark. His day was the light of his Father's face : that face was hidden and a terrible night gathered around him. Brothers, I should sin against that veil if I were to pretend that I could tell you what the sorrow was which oppressed the Saviour's soul : only so far can I speak as it has been given me to have fellowship with him in his sufferings. Have you ever felt a deep and overwhelming horror of sin—your own sin and the sins of others ? Have you ever seen sin in the light of God's love ? Has it ever darkly hovered over your sensitive conscience ? Has an unknown sense of wrath crept over you like midnight gloom ; and has it been about you, around you, above you, and within you ? Have you felt shut up in your feebleness, and yet shut out from God ? Have you looked around and found no help, no comfort even in God—no hope, no peace ? In all this you have sipped a little of that salt sea into which our Lord was cast. If, like Abraham, you have felt a horror of great darkness creep over you, then have you had a taste of what your divine Lord suffered when it pleased the Father to bruise him and to put him to grief. This it was that made him sweat great drops of blood falling to the ground ; and this it was which on the cross made him utter that appalling cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me" ? It was not the crown of thorns, or the scourge, or the cross which made him cry, but the darkness, the awful darkness of desertion which oppressed his mind and made him feel like one distraught. All that could comfort him was withdrawn, and all that could distress him was piled upon him. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity ; but a wounded spirit who can bear" ? Our Saviour's spirit was wounded, and he cried, "My heart is like wax ; it is melted in the midst of my bowels." Of all natural and spiritual comfort he was bereft, and his distress was utter and entire. The darkness of Calvary did not, like an ordinary night, reveal the stars ; but it darkened every lamp of heaven. His strong crying and tears denoted the deep sorrow of his soul. He bore all it was possible for his capacious mind to bear, though enlarged and invigorated by union with the Godhead. He bore the equivalent of hell ; nay, not that only, but he bore that which stood instead of ten thousand hells so far as the vindication of the law is concerned. Our Lord rendered in his death agony a homage to justice far greater than if a world had been doomed to destruction. When I have said that, what more can I say ? Well may I tell you that this unutterable darkness, this hiding of the Divine face, expresses more of the woes of Jesus than words can ever tell.

Again, I think I see in that darkness, also *what it was that Jesus was battling with* ; for we must never forget that the cross was a battle-field to him, wherein he triumphed gloriously. He was fighting then with darkness ; with the powers of darkness of which Satan is the head ; with the darkness of human ignorance, depravity, and falsehood. The battle

thus apparent at Golgotha has been raging ever since. Then was the conflict at its height ; for the chiefs of the two great armies met in personal conflict. The present battle in which you and I take our little share is as nothing compared with that wherein all the powers of darkness in their dense battalions hurled themselves against the Almighty Son of God. He bore their onset, endured the tremendous shock of their assault, and in the end, with shout of victory, he led captivity captive. He by his power and Godhead turned midnight into day again, and brought back to this world a reign of light which, blessed be God, shall never come to a close. Come to battle again, ye hosts of darkness, if ye dare ! The cross has defeated you : the cross shall defeat you. Hallelujah ! The cross is the ensign of victory ; its light is the death of darkness. The cross is the light-house which guides poor weather-beaten humanity into the harbour of peace : this is the lamp which shines over the door of the great Father's house to lead his prodigals home.

Let us not be afraid of all the darkness which besets us on our way home, since Jesus is the light which conquers it all.

The darkness never came to an end till the Lord Jesus broke the silence. All had been still, and the darkness had grown terrible. At last he spoke, and his voice uttered a psalm. It was the twenty-second Psalm. " My God," saith he, " my God, why hast thou forsaken me ? " Each repeated " Elloi " flashed morning upon the scene. By the time he had uttered the cry " Why hast thou forsaken me ? " men had begun to see again, and some even ventured to misinterpret his words, more in terror than in ignorance. They said, " He calleth Elias " : they may have meant a mock, but I think not. At any rate there was no heart in what they said, nor in the reply of their fellows. Yet the light had come by which they could see to dip the sponge in vinegar. Brethren, no light will ever come to dark hearts unless Jesus shall speak ; and the light will not be clear until we hear the voice of his sorrows on our behalf, as he cries, " Why hast thou forsaken me ? " His voice of grief must be the end of our griefs : his cry out of the darkness must cheer away our gloom, and bring the heavenly morning to our minds.

You see how much there is in my text. It is a joy to speak on such a theme when one is in good health, and full of vigour ; then are we as Naphtali, a hind let loose ; then give we goodly words : but this day I am in pain as to my body, and my mind seems frozen. Nevertheless, the Lord can bless my feeble words, and make you see that in this darkness there is meaning deep and wide which none of us should neglect. If God shall help your meditations this darkness will be light about you.

IV. I come to my fourth point, and my closing words will deal with THE SYMPATHY WHICH PROPHECIES. Do you see the sympathy of nature with her Lord—the sympathy of the sun in the heavens with the Sun of Righteousness ? It was not possible for him by whom all things were made to be in darkness, and for nature to remain in the light.

The first sympathetic fact I see is this : *all lights are dim when Christ shines not*. All is dark when he does not shine. In the church, if Jesus be not there, what is there ? The sun itself could not yield us light if Jesus were withdrawn. The seven golden lamps are ready to go out unless he walks among them, and trims them with the holy oil. Brethren,

you soon grow heavy, and your spirits faint, and your hands are weary, if the Christ be not with you. If Jesus Christ be not fully preached, if he be not with us by his Spirit, then everything is in darkness. Obscure the cross, and you have obscured all spiritual teaching. You cannot say, "We will be perspicuous in every other point, and clear upon every other doctrine, but we will shun the atonement, since so many cavil at it. No, sirs, if that candle be put under a bushel the whole house is dark. All theology sympathizes with the cross, and is coloured and tintured by it. Your pious service, your books, your public worship, will all be in sympathy with the cross one way or another. If the cross is in the dark, so will all your work be.

"What think ye of Christ? is the test
To try both your work and your scheme;
You cannot be right in the rest,
Unless you think rightly of him."

Conjure up your doubts; fabricate your philosophies; and compose your theories: there will be no light in them if the cross be left out. Vain are the sparks of your own making, you shall lie down in sorrow. All our work and travail shall end in vanity unless the work and travail of Christ be our first and sole hope. If you are dark upon that point, which alone is light, how great is your darkness!

Next, *see the dependence of all creation upon Christ*, as evidenced by its darkness when he withdraws. It was not meet that he who made all worlds should die, and yet all worlds should go on just as they had done. If he suffers eclipse, they must suffer eclipse too; if the Sun of Righteousness be made to set in blood, the natural sun must keep touch with him. I believe, my friends, that there is a much more wonderful sympathy between Christ and the world of nature than any of us have ever dreamed. The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now, because Christ in the Church is in his travail pangs. Christ in his mystical body is in travail, and so the whole creation must wait for the manifestation of the Son of God. We are waiting for the coming of the Lord from heaven, and there is no hill or dale, there is no mountain or sea, but what is in perfect harmony with the waiting church. Wonder not that there should be earthquakes in divers places, blazing volcanoes, terrible tempests, and sore spreadings of deadly disease. Marvel not when you hear of dire portents, and things that make one's heart to quail, for such things must be till the end shall come. Until the great Shepherd shall make his crook into a sceptre, and shall begin his unsuffering reign, this poor earth must bleed at every vein. There must be darkness till these days of delay are ended. You that expect placid history till Christ shall come expect you know not what. You that think that generous politics shall create order and content, and that the extension of free-trade shall breathe universal peace over the nations, look for the living among the dead. Till the Lord shall come, the word has gone out, "Overturn, overturn, overturn," and overturned all things must be, not only in other kingdoms, but in this also, till Jesus comes. All that can be shaken shall be shaken, and only his immovable throne and truth shall abide. Now is the time of the Lord's battle with darkness, and we may not hope as yet for unbroken light.

Dear friends, the sin which darkened Christ and made him die in the

dark darkens the whole world. The sin that darkened Christ and made him hang upon the cross in the dark is darkening you who do not believe in him, and you will live in the dark and die in the dark unless you get to him who only is the light of the world, and can give light to you. There is no light for any man except in Christ; and till you believe in him thick darkness shall blind you, and you shall stumble in it and perish. That is the lesson I would have you learn.

Another practical lesson is this: If we are in the dark at this time, if our spirits are sunk in gloom, let us not despair, for the Lord Christ himself was there. If I have fallen into misery on account of sin, let me not give up all hope, for the Father's Well-beloved passed through denser darkness than mine. O believing soul, if thou art in the dark thou art near the King's cellars, and there are wines on the lees well refined lying there. Thou hast gotten into the pavilion of the Lord, and now mayest thou speak with him. You will not find Christ in the gaudy tents of pride, nor in the foul haunts of wickedness: you will not find him where the viol, and the dance, and the flowing bowl inflame the lusts of men, but in the house of mourning you will meet the Man of Sorrows. He is not where Herodias dances, nor where Bernice displays her charms; but he is where the woman of a sorrowful spirit moves her lips in prayer. He is never absent where penitence sits in darkness and bewails her faults.

“Yes, Lord, in hours of gloom,
When shadows fill my room,
When pain breathes forth its groans,
And grief its sighs and moans,
Then thou art near.”

If you are under a cloud, feel after your Lord, if haply you may find him. Stand still in your black sorrow, and say, “O Lord, the preacher tells me that thy cross once stood in such darkness as this—O Jesus hear me!” He will respond to you: the Lord will look out of the pillar of cloud, and shed a light upon you. “I know their sorrows,” saith he. He is no stranger to heart-break. Christ also once suffered for sin. Trust him, and he will cause his light to shine upon you. Lean upon him, and he will bring you up out of the gloomy wilderness into the land of rest. God help you to do so!

Last Monday I was cheered beyond all I can tell you by a letter from a brother who had been restored to life, light, and liberty by the discourse of last Sabbath morning. I know no greater joy than to be useful to your souls. For this reason, I have tried to preach this morning, though I am quite unfit for it physically. Oh, I do pray I may hear more news from saved ones! Oh that some spirit that has wandered out into the dark moorland may spy the candle in my window, and find its way home! If you have found my Lord, I charge you never let him go, but cleave to him till the day break, and the shadows flee away. God help you so to do for Jesus' sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew xxvii. 26—54.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—306, 279, 280.