

Light at Evening Time

A Sermon

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"And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear nor dark: But it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day, nor night; but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light."—[Zechariah 14:6-7.](#)

AS WE read the Scriptures, we are continually startled by fresh discoveries of the magnificence of God. Our attention is fixed upon a passage, and presently sparklets of fire and glory dart forth. It strikes us; we are struck by it. Hence these bright coruscations. Our admiration is excited. We could not have thought that so much light could possibly lie concealed within a few words. Our text thus reveals to us in a remarkable manner the penetration, the discernment, the clear-sightedness of God. To our weak vision the current of human affairs is like twilight. It is not altogether dark, for it is broken with some gleams of hope. Nor is it altogether bright, for heavy masses of darkness intervene. It is neither day nor night. There is a mingle-mangle of good and evil, a strange confused mixture, wherein the powers of darkness contend with the powers of light. But it is not so with God. With him, it is one clear day. What we think to be confusion, is order before his eye. Where we see advance and retrogression, he sees perpetual progress. We full often bemoan our circumstances as altogether disastrous, while God, who seeth the end from the beginning, is working out his ordained purpose. Our God maketh the clouds to be the dust of his feet, and the winds to be his chariot. He sees order in the tempest and the whirlwind. When the bosom of earth heaves with earthquake, he hears music in every throb and when earth and heaven seem mingled in one wild disorder and storm, his hand is in the midst of all, so marking, that every particle of matter should be obedient to his settled laws, and that all things should work together to produce one glorious result. "Things are not what they seem." Oh! how good it is for us to know that this world's history is not so black and bad as to our dim senses it would appear. God is writing it out, sometimes with a heavy pen; but when complete, it will read like one great poem, magnificent in its plan, and perfect in all its details. At the present hour there may be much in the condition of our country to cause anxiety or even to create alarm. And it is not hard to point certainly to many things that seem to augur no good. But there always were evil prophets. There always have been times and crises when dark portents favoured unwelcome predictions. But thus far the fury of every tempest has

been mitigated; a sweet calm has followed each perilous swell of the ocean, and the good old ship has kept afloat England's flag—we fondly believe:—

"The flag that's braved a thousand years,
The battle and the breeze,"

will not be run down yet. We thank God that the history of our deliverances supplies us with fair omens of an ever-gracious Providence. Let us comfort ourselves with the belief that there is a future of peace and prosperity within her borders and of influence for good among the nations of the world for Britain and British Christians. Then let each man brace up his sinews for the fight, and struggle for the right Bright days are assuredly in store for those who lift the standard and unfurl the flag of righteousness and truth. "At evening time it shall be light." Even now it is "one day" which is known to the Lord.

As our time is brief, I mean to confine your attention to one clause of the text, "At evening time it shall be light." It seems to be a rule in God's dispensations that his light should break upon men gradually; and when it appears about to suffer an eclipse it will brighten up and shine with extraordinary lustre. "At evening time it shall be light." Of this mode of God's procedure we will take five illustrations.

I. LET REVELATION SUPPLY US WITH THE FIRST.

When God first revealed himself to the sons of men, he did not come to them in a blazing chariot of fire, manifesting all his glorious attributes. The sun in the Tropics, we are told, rises on a sudden. The inhabitants of those regions know none of our delightful twilight at dawn or evening, but the curtain rises and falls abruptly. This is not the way in which God has revealed himself to us by degrees, softly, slowly, he lifts the veil. Thus has God been pleased to make himself known. He took in his hand a flaming, torch when the world was dark. Without a single ray of comfort, and he lit up the first star that ever shone over the wild waste of the world's wilderness. That star was the promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. In the light of that promise our first parents and their immediate descendants were cheered in their daily toil. Seth and Enoch walked with no other light that we know of but that. There is no record of any promise beside, which they had received from the Lord. By-and-bye, as years revolved, God lit up another star, and then another and another, till at last Holy Scripture became like our sky at midnight-studded all over with greater and lesser luminaries, all brightly manifesting the glory of God.

Still it was night. Though there was a little light, there was a prevalence of darkness. All through the Jewish dispensation, the sun did not shine. There was only cold, but beautiful in its season, silver moonlight. Heavenly truths were reflected in shadows; the substance was not visible. It was an economy of cloud and smoke, of type and symbol, but not of light and day of life, and immortality. For all the light that "o'er the dark her silver mantle threw," the saints of those times were glad and grateful; but how much more cause for joy and gratitude have we on whom the golden sun has shone! Star after star had been lit up in the

heavens by the inspiration of Moses, and Samuel, and David, and all the prophets, till dark and deep the night began to fall, till sable clouds gathered dense with direful auguries. and at length a wild tempest was heard thundering in the sky. Isaiah had completed the long roll of his prophecy; Jeremiah had uttered all his lamentations. The eagle wing of Ezekiel soared no longer. Daniel had recorded his visions and entered into rest. Zechariah and Haggai had fulfilled their mission, and at last Malachi, foreseeing the day that should burn as an oven, and beyond it the day when the Sun of righteousness should arise with healing in his wings, closed that volume of testimony. That was midnight. The stare seemed to be dying out, like as withered fig-leaves fall from the tree. There was no open vision; the Word of God was scarce; there was a famine of the bread of life in those days. And what then? Why, you all know. At evening time it was light. Be who had long been promised suddenly came into his temple, a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of his people Israel. The world's darkest hour had come, when there was born in Bethlehem, of the house of David, Jesus, the Kin, of the Jews, and the Saviour of men. Then the day dawned, and the day-spring from on high visited us, precisely at that darkest hour, when men said, "God has forsaken the world, and left it to pine away in everlasting gloom". Let that serve for a first illustration of light at evening time, notable as a fact, and worthy to be recollected. This, too, is precisely the way in which God acts:—

II. IN THE CONVERSION OF INDIVIDUALS.

God's laws on a great scale are always the same as his laws on little scale. A pretty little rhyme, that many of you are familiar with, endorses this statement.

"The very law that moulds a tear,
And bids it trickle from its source
That law preserves the world a sphere,
And guides the planets in their course."

The same law which controls a planet affects a grain of dust. As God caused revelation to arise gradually, and, growing clearer and clearer, to become clearest when it seemed about to expire, so in the experience of each individual, the dawn precedes the day. When the light of divine grace first visits a man, it shines with feeble beam. Man by nature is, like a house shut up, the windows of which are all boarded over. Grace does not open every window jet once and bid the sun stream in upon weak eyes accustomed to darkness. It rather takes down a part of a shutter at a time, removes some obstruction, and so lets in, through chinks, a little light, that one may be able to bear it by degrees. The window of man's soul is so thickly encrusted with dirt, so thoroughly begrimed, that no light at all can penetrate it, till one layer is taken off, and a little yellow light is seen; and then another is removed, and then another, still admitting more light, and clearer. Was it not so with you who are now walking in the light of God's countenance, Did not your light come to you by little and little? Your experience, I know, confirms my statement, and as the light came, and you discovered your

sin, and began to see the suitability of Christ to meet your case, you hoped that all was going on well. Then peradventure, on a sudden, the light seemed altogether to depart. You were cast into the thick darkness into the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and you said, "Oh! now my lamp is put out for ever! I am cast out from God's presence! I am doomed beyond the hope of mercy! I shall be lost for ever and ever!" Well now, Christian, ask yourself what came of this? When you were thus broken, sore broken in the place of dragons, and your soul suffered the wreck of all its carnal confidence, what then? At that evening time the light shone clearer with you than it had ever before. When darkness veiled your mind, you looked to Christ, and were lightened with the true light. Despairing of yourself, you cast yourself into the arms of Christ, and you had that peace of God which passeth all understanding, and still keeps your heart and mind through Jesus Christ.

May be I am addressing some who have been for a long while the subjects of such humbling influences, breaking them down. You had hoped things were going pretty fairly with you, and you trusted that at the last you would come out into clear sunshine. But oh! how disappointed you feel! You never felt so wicked, never knew that you were so desperately rebellious. Your heart is hard and stubborn; you feel as if there was a mutiny in your breast. "Surely," you say, "such an one as I am never can be saved; it is a hopeless case." Oh! my brother, very hopeful to our view is that which appears so hopeless to you.

"Tis perfect poverty alone
That sets the soul at large;
While we can call one mite our own,
We have no full discharge."

Are you emptied of all merit, goodness, and hope in yourselves? Then your redemption draweth nigh. When you are cleared out and turned upside down, then eternal mercy greets you. Trust Christ. If you cannot swim, give yourselves up to the stream, and you shall float. If you cannot stand, give yourselves up to him, and he will bear you as on eagles' wings. Give up *yourself*. There, let it die; it is the worst enemy you ever had. Though you relied upon it, it has been a delusion and a snare to you. Now, therefore, throw the whole weight and burden of your life of sin and folly upon Jesus' Christ, the Sin-bearer, and this shall be the time of your deliverance, so the darkest hour you ever knew shall give place to the brightest you have ever experienced. You shall go your way rejoicing, with a joy unspeakable and full of glory. A third illustration may be found in:—

III. THE DELIVERANCES WHICH A COVENANT GOD WORKS FOR AN AFFLICTED PEOPLE

The same rule which we have already observed will hold good here—at evening time it shall be light. No child of God can be very long without trouble of some kind or other, for sure it is that the road to heaven will always be rough. Some visionaries have been talking of making a railroad to the city. With this view, they would fill up the Slough of Despond,

run a tramway right through the middle of it, and construct a tunnel through the hill Difficulty. I would not advise any of you to be shareholders in the company, for it will never answer. It will bring thousands to the river of Death, and swamp them there, but at the gates of the Celestial City not a passenger will ever arrive by that route. There is a pilgrimage, and a weary pilgrimage too, which must be taken before you can obtain entrance into those gates. Still, in all their trials, God's people always find it true that at evening time it shall be light. Are you suffering from temporal troubles. You cannot expect to be without these. They are hard to bear. This, however, should cheer you, that God is as much engaged to succour and support you in your temporal, as he is in your spiritual interests. Beloved, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Not a sparrow falls on the ground without your Father knowing it. Well, now, taking quite a *material view of the question*, you are of more value than many sparrows. You may be very poor, yet be very, very dear to your Father in heaven. Your poverty may reduce you to the utmost pinch, but that will be the time of your sweetest relief. The widow woman at the gates of Zarepta could hardly have been more wretched than when she had gone out to gather a few sticks—she says two—enough, I suppose, to cook the handful of meal and the few drops of oil, with which to make the last morsel for herself and for her son. Ay, poor soul! At that very moment the prophet of God came in—not while there was much meal or much oil, but just as they were all spent. He came to tell her that the barrel of meal should not waste, nor the cruse of oil fail, till the Lord sent rain, and famine ceased in the land. God's people in Egypt were not brought out until the rigour of their bondage had become too bitter to bear. When it was intolerable, the Lord redeemed them with a strong arm and a high hand. You may, my dear hearer, be so tried that you think nobody ever had such a trial. Well, then, your faith may look out for such a deliverance as nobody else ever experienced. If you have an excess of grief, you shall have the more abundant relief. If you have been alone in sorrow, you shall, by-and-bye, have a joy unspeakable, with which no stranger can intermeddle. You shall lead the song of praise, as chief musicians, whose wailings were most bitter in the abodes of woe. Do cast your burden on God. Let me beseech those of you who love him, not to be shy of him. Disclose to him your temporal griefs. For you, young people, you remember I have just prayed that you might early in life learn to cast your burden upon God. Your trials and troubles, while you are at home under your father's roof, are not so heavy as those that will come when you begin to shift for yourselves. Still, you may think them heavier, because your older friends make light of them. Well, while you yet remain at the home of your childhood, acquire the habit of carrying your daily troubles and griefs to God. Whisper them into your Heavenly Father's ear, and he will help you. And why should you men of business try to weather the storm without your God? 'Tis well to have *industry, shrewdness*, and what is called *self-reliance*—a disposition to meet difficulties with determination, not with despondency:—

"To take arms against a sea of troubles,

And by opposing end them."

Still, the only safe, the only happy course for merchant or tradesman is to commit his way unto God, with a simple, child-like faith, taking counsel at the Scriptures, and seeking guidance in prayer. You will find it to be a blessed way of passing through the ordinary routine of daily anxieties, and the extraordinary pressure of occasional alarms and panics, if you can but realise your sacred privileges as disciples of Christ in the midst of all your secular duties.

Or are our trials of a *spiritual character*? Here full often our trials abound, and here, too, we may expect that at evening time it shall be light. Perhaps some of you pursue the road to heaven with very few soul-conflicts. Certainly there are some who do not often get through a week without being troubled on every side-fighting without, and fears within. Ah! brethren, when some of you tell me of your doubts and fears, I can well sympathise with you, if I cannot succour you. Is there anywhere a soul more vexed with doubts, and fears, and soul-conflicts than mine? I know not one. With heights of joy in serving my Master, I am happily familiar, but into very depths of despair-such an inward sinking as I cannot describe-I have likewise sunk. A more frequent, or a more fearful wretchedness of heart than I have suffered it is not likely any of you ever felt. Yet do I know that my Redeemer liveth, that the battle is sure, that the victory is safe. If my testimony be worth aught, I have always found that when I am most distressed about circumstances that I cannot control, when my hope seems to flicker where it ought to flare, when the worthlessness and wretchedness of my nature obscure the evident of any goodness and virtue imparted to me or wrought in me, just then it is that a sweet spring of cool consolation bubbles up to quench my thirst, and a sweet voice greets my ear, "It is I; be not afraid". My witness is for the Master, that, though he may leave us for a little, it is not for long. "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercy have I gathered thee; in a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting mercy will I have pity upon thee, saith the Lord, thy Redeemer. "Oh! believer, stay yourself upon God when you have nothing else to stay upon. Do not rely upon appearances; above all, do not listen to the suggestions of a murmuring, hardened spirit; do not credit the insinuations of the infernal fiend who, when he finds you down-hearted, be it from sickness of body or anxiety of mind, is sure then to whisper some disparaging thoughts of God. What though the suggestion strikes your heart that the Lord has forsaken you, that your sins cannot be forgiven, that you will fall by the hand of the enemy, hurl it back. You know whence it came. Depend upon it, though heaven and earth go to wreck, God's promise will stand. Should hell break loose, and demons innumerable invade this earth, they shall not go one inch beyond their tether. The chain that God has cast about them shall restrain them. Not an heir of heaven shall be left to the clutch of the destroyer. Nay, his head shall not lose a hair without divine permission. You shall come out of the furnace with not a smell of fire upon you. And being so eminently preserved, in such immin-

ent peril, your salvation shall constrain you to bless God on earth, and bless him to all eternity, with the deepest self-humiliation and the highest strains of gratitude and adoration. So, then, both in our temporal and spiritual concerns, at evening time, when the worst has come to the worst, it shall be light. When the tide has ebbed out the farthest, it will begin to flow in. When the winter has advanced to the shortest day, we shall then begin to return to spring. Be assured that it is so, it has been so, and it shall be so. To the very end of your days you may look for light at evening time. And now may I not appeal for a fourth illustration of the same truth to some of our friends who have come to:—

IV. THE EVENING TIME OF HUMAN LIFE?

This is often a delightful time, when the shadows are drawn out, and the air is still, and there is a season of preparation for the last undressing, and of anticipation for the appearing before the King in his beauty. I envy some of our brethren, the more advanced saints. Although old age brings its infirmities and its sorrows, yet they have found that brings with it the mellow joys of a matured experience, and a near prospect of the coming glory so near, so very near to their actual realisation. John Bunyan's picture of the Land Beulah was no dream, though he calls it so. Some of our aged brethren and sisters have come to a place of very peaceful repose, where they do hear the songs of angels from the other side of the stream, and the bundles of myrrh from the mountains of Bethen they bear in their bosoms. I know you find, my dear friends, that at evening time it is light to you, very light. You were called by grace when you were young. Bright was your day-dawn; a precious dew from the Lord fell upon you in the morning. You have borne the burden and heat of the day. You feel like a child that has grown tired. You are ready to say, "Let us go to sleep, mother; let us go to sleep." But meanwhile, before you close your eyes you are conscious of such divine refreshment, of such love and such joy shed abroad in your hearts, that you find the last stage of the journey to be blessed indeed, waiting and watching for the trumpet-call that shall bid you come up higher. Your light is brighter now than ever it was before. When you come at length to depart, though it will be "evening time" in very truth, it will be "light." You have watched the sun go down sometimes. How glorious he is at his setting! He looks twice as large as he did when he was high up in the sky, and if the clouds gather round him, how he tints them all with glory! Is there anything in all the world so magnificent as the setting sun, when all the colours of heaven seem poured out upon earth's sky? It does not fill you with gloom, for it is so radiant with glory. Such, now, shall your dying bed be. To those who watch you, you shall be an object of more sacred interest than ever you were before. If there be some pains that distress you, and some temptations that harass you, they shall be but the clouds which your Master's grace and your Saviour's presence shall gild with splendour. Oh! how light, how very light, it has been at evening time with some of our beloved friends! We have envied them as we have beheld the brightness gleaming from their brows in their last expiring moments. Oh! their songs! You cannot sing like them. Oh! their notes of ecstasy!

You cannot understand the bliss unspeakable, as though the spray of the waves of heaven dashed into their faces, as though the light of the unclouded land had begun to stream upon their visage, and they were transfigured upon their Tabor before they passed into their rest!

Never fear dying, beloved. Dying is the last, but the least, matter that a Christian has to be anxious about. Fear living—that is a hard battle to fight; a stern discipline to endure; a rough voyage to undergo. You may well invoke God's omnipotence to your aid. But to die, that is to end the strife, to finish your course, to enter the calm heaven. Your Captain, your Leader, your Pilot is with you. One moment, and it is over: "A gentle wafting to immortal life." It is the lingering pulse of life that makes the pains and groans. Death ends them all. What a light, oh! what a transparent light it must be when the spirit immediately passes through the veil into the glory-land! In vain the fancy strives to paint the vision of angels and of disembodied spirits, and, above all, the brightness of the glory of Christ the Lamb in the midst of the throne! Oh! the joy of that first bowing before the Mercy-seat! Oh! the rapture of that first casting the crown at his feet who loved us and redeemed us! Oh! the transport of that first folding in Immanuel's bosom, that first kiss with the kisses of his mouth, face to face! Do you not long for it? May you not say, "drop rapidly, ye sands of time! Fly round, ye axles of the running years, and let his chariot come, or let our soul soon pass, and leave her mortal frame behind, to be for ever with the Lord!" Yes, "at evening time it shall be light." Turning now from these personal reflections, we seek our last illustration in the mysterious unfolding of destiny, for it is our firm belief that:—

V. IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD AT LARGE this saying shall be verified, and it shall come to pass that "at evening time it shall be light."

Darkness has prevailed for a long time, nor does the prospect grow much brighter at present. The noble enterprise of our great missionary societies is not altogether unrequited. The prayers and efforts of a long succession of godly men are not to be accounted vain and fruitless, but we commonly feel more cause to lament than to exult. How little is the world lit up with the light of God yet! Are there more saved souls in the world now than there were a hundred years after Christ's death? I do not know that there are. A greater surface is covered with the profession of Christianity now, but at that time the light was bright where it did shine. I am afraid to say what I think of the gloom that is hanging in thick folds of cloud and scud, over the nations of the earth. Still the oracle cheers my heart, "At evening time it shall be light." Some men prophesy that it will not be so. Long ages of delay make them grow impatient. This impatience provokes questioning. Those questions invariably tend to unbelief. But who shall make void the promises of God? Are not nations to be born in a day? Will the wild Arab never bow before the King of Zion? Shall not Ethiopia stretch out her arms to God? As children of the day, doth it not behove us to walk in the light of the Lord? Divine testimony has more weight with us than the conjectures of benighted men! Christ has bought this world, and he will have it in possession from the river even to the

ends of the earth. He has redeemed it, and he will claim it for his own. You may rest assured that whatever is contained in the scroll of prophecy shall be fulfilled according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. Notwithstanding any difficulties you may have in interpreting the seals or the trumpets of the Apocalypse, You have no room to doubt that Jesus Christ will be acknowledged King of Kings and Lord of Lords over this whole world, and that in every corner and nook of it his name will be famous. To him every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Do not be troubled by seers or soothsayers. Rest patiently. "Of the times and seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you, for ye yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." As for you, your business is to work for the spreading of his kingdom, to be continually scattering the light you have, and praying for more, to be waiting upon God for more of the tongue of fire, for more of the baptism of the Eternal Spirit, for more vital quickening power. When the whole Church shall be wakened up to a spirit of earnestness and enterprise, the conversion of this world will be speedily accomplished; the idols will then be cast to the moles and the bats; anti-Christ shall sink like a millstone in the flood, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

Talking but the other day upon missionary affairs with one who understands them well, he said, "Sir, we have enough missionaries in India now, of all sorts, for the evangelisation of India, if no more were sent out, provided that they were the right men." Oh! God, call, qualify, send for the right men; baptize them with the Holy Ghost and with fire; and make them fit instruments to do, to dare, to die, but withal to conquer. Bethink you, brethren, how, when Christ began with twelve men, he shook the earth, and now that Christians are numbered by tens of thousands, do ye tell me that the glory of God is not to be revealed, and the conquest of the world is not to be completed? I am afraid the Church is getting downhearted. She holds her banner low; she marches to the fight with bated breath and tremulous spirit. She will never win thus with craven heart. Oh! that she had more faith in her God! Then would she be "clear as the moon, fair as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners." If she would expect great things, she would see great things. Nations would be born in a day if we believed it and myriads would flock, like doves, to their windows if we did but look for it, work for it, and bless God for such a measure of encouragement as we have. "At evening time it shall be light." Accept this as a prophecy. Believe it on the highest warranty. Hope for it with the liveliest anticipation. So may ye live to see it. And unto God shall be the praise, world without end. Amen.

*"Reference is made here to a circumstance which caused the English public some passing anxiety; but a few days sufficed to disperse the cloud, and in a few months it was obliterated from people's memory."