

Seasons of Darkness

by Charles Spurgeon

Night appears to be a time peculiarly favourable to devotion. Its solemn stillness helps to free the mind from that perpetual din which the cares of the world will bring around it; and the stars looking down from heaven upon us shine as if they would attract us up to God. I know not how you may be affected by the solemnities of midnight, but when I have sat alone musing on the great God and mighty universe, I have felt that indeed I could worship Him: for night seemed to be spread abroad as a very temple for adoration, while the moon walked as high priest, amid the stars, the worshippers, and I myself joined in that silent song which they sang unto God: "Great art Thou, O God! great are Thy works. When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained; what is man that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visiteth him?" I find that this sense of the power of midnight not only acts upon religious men, but there is a certain poet, whose character, perhaps, I could scarcely too much reprobate: a man very far from understanding true religion; one whom I may, I suppose, justly style an infidel, a libertine of the worst order, and yet he says concerning night in one of his poems:

Tis midnight on the mountains' brown,
The cold round moon shines deeply down;
Blue roll the waters, blue the sky
Spreads like an ocean hung on high
Bespangled with those isles of light,
So wildly, spiritually bright;
Who ever gazed upon them shining,
And turning to earth without repining,
Nor wish'd for wings to flee away,
And mix with their eternal ray.

Even with the most irreligious person, a man farthest from spiritual thought, it seems that there is some power in the grandeur and stillness of night to draw him up to God. I trust many of us can say, like David, "I have thought upon Thee continually; I have mused upon Thy name in the night watches, and with desire have I desired Thee in the night."

The Christian man has not always a bright shining sun: he has his seasons of darkness and of night. True, it is written in God's Word: "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace;" and it is a great truth that religion—the true religion of the living God—is calculated to give a man happiness below as well as bliss above. But, notwithstanding, experience tells us that if the course of the just be "as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day," yet sometimes that light is eclipsed. At certain periods clouds and darkness cover the sun, and he beholds no clear shining of the daylight, but walks in darkness and sees no light.

Now there are many who have rejoiced in the presence of God for a season; they have basked in the sunshine God has been pleased to give them in the earlier stages of their Christian career; they have walked along the "green pastures," by the side of the "still waters," and suddenly—in a month or two—they find that glorious sky is clouded; instead of "green pastures," they have to tread the sandy desert; in the place of "still waters," they find streams brackish to their taste and bitter to their spirits, and they say, "surely, if I were a child of God this would not happen." Oh, say not so, thou who art walking in darkness! The best of God's saints have their nights; the dearest of His children have to walk through a weary wilderness. There is not a Christian who has enjoyed perpetual happiness; there is no believer who can always sing a song of joy. It is not every lark that can always carol. It is not every star that can always be seen. And not every Christian is always happy. Perhaps the King of saints gave you a season of great joy at first because you were a raw recruit, and He would not put you into the roughest part of the battle when you had first enlisted. You were a tender plant, and He nursed you in the hothouse till you could stand severe weather. You were a young child, and therefore He wrapped you in furs and clothed you in the softest mantle. But now you have become strong, and the case is different. Capuan holidays do not suit Roman soldiers; and they would not agree with Christians. We need clouds and darkness to exercise our faith; to cut off self-dependence, and make us put more faith in Christ, and less in evidence, less in experience, less in frames and feelings. The best of God's children—I repeat it again for the comfort of those who are suffering depression of spirits—have their nights. Sometimes it is a night over the whole Church at once. There are times when Zion is under a cloud; when the whole fine gold becomes dim, and the glory of Zion is departed. There are seasons when we do not hear the clear preaching of the Word; when the doctrines are withheld; when the glory of the Lord God of Jacob is dim; when His name is not exalted; when the traditions of men are taught, instead of the inspirations of the Holy Ghost. And such a season is that when the whole Church is dark. Of course, each Christian participates in it. He goes about and weeps, and cries, "O God, how long shall poor Zion be depressed? How long shall her shepherds be 'dumb dogs that cannot bark?' Shall her watchmen be always blind? Shall the silver trumpet sound no more? Shall not the voice of the gospel be heard in her streets?" Oh, there are seasons of darkness to the entire Church! God grant we may not have to pass through another, but that, starting from this period, the sun may rise ne'er to set, till, like a sea of glory, the light of brilliance shall spread from pole to pole!

At other times, this darkness over the soul of the Christian rises from temporal distresses. He may have had a misfortune as it is called—something has gone wrong in his business, or an enemy has done somewhat against him; death has struck down a favorite child—bereavement has snatched away the darling of his bosom; the crops are blighted; the winds refuse to bear his ships homeward; a vessel strikes upon a rock, another founders; all goes ill with him, and, like a gentleman who called to see me, he may be able to say, "Sir, I prospered far more when I was a worldly man than I have done since I have become a Christian: for, since then, everything has appeared to go wrong with me. I thought," he said, "that religion had the promise of this life as well as that which is to come." I told him, Yes, it had; and so it should be in the end. But he must remember there was one great legacy which Christ left His people; and I was glad he had come in for a share of it—"In the world ye shall have tribulation; in Me ye shall have peace." Yes! you may be troubled about this, you may be saying, "Look at so-and-so: see how he spreads himself like a green bay-tree. He is an extortioner and

wicked man, yet everything he does prospers. You may even observe his death, and say, there are no bands in his death." "They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men." God hath set them in slippery places, but he casteth them down to destruction. Better to have a Christian's days of sorrow, than a worldling's days of mirth. Better to have a Christian's sorrows than a worldling's joys. Ah! happier to be chained in a dungeon with a Paul than reign in the palace with an Ahab. Better to be a child of God in poverty than a child of Satan in riches. Cheer up, then, thou downcast spirit, if this be thy trial. Remember that many saints have passed through the same; and the best and most eminent believers have had their nights.

Christian men very frequently have their nights; but a Christian man's religion will keep its colour in the night. "With my soul have I desired Thee in the night." What a mighty deal of silver-slipper religion we have in this world. Men will follow Christ whenever one cries, "Hosanna! Hosanna!" The multitude will crowd around the Man then, and they will take Him by force and make Him a king when the sun shines, when the soft wind blows. They are like the plants upon the rocks, which sprang up and for a little while were green; but when the sun had risen with fervent heat straightway withered away. Demas and Mr. Hold-the-world, and the great many others, are very pious people in easy times. They will always go with Christ by daylight, and will keep in company as long as fashion gives religion the doubtful benefit of its patronage. But they will not go with Him in the night. There are some goods whose colour you can only see by daylight—and there are many professors the colour of whom you can only see by daylight. If they were in the night of trouble and persecutions you would find that there was very little in them. They are good by daylight, but they are bad by night.

Do you not know that the best test of a Christian is the night? The nightingale, if she would sing by day when every goose is cackling, would be reckoned no better a musician than the wren. A Christian if he only remained steadfast by daylight, when every coward is bold, what would he be? There would be no beauty in his courage, no glory in his bravery. But it is because he can sing at night—sing in trouble—sing when he is driven well-nigh to despair; it is this which proves his sincerity. It has its glory in the night. The stars are not visible by daylight, but they become apparent when the sun is set. There is full many a Christian whose piety did not burn much when he was in prosperity; but it will be known in adversity.

I have marked it in some of my brethren when they were in deep trial. I had not heard them discourse much about Christ before, but when God's hand had robbed them of their comfort, I remember that I could discern their religion infinitely better than I could before. Nothing can bring our religion out better than that. Grind the diamond a little and you shall see it glisten. Do but put a trouble on the Christian, and his endurance of it will prove him to be of the true seed of Israel.

All that the Christian wants in the night is his God "With desire have I desired Thee in the night. " By day there are many things that a Christian will desire besides His Lord; but in the night he wants nothing but his God. I cannot understand how it is unless it is to be accounted for by the corruption of our spirit, that when everything goes well with us we are setting our affection first on this object and then on another, and then on another; and that desire which is as insatiable as death and as deep as hell never rests satisfied. We are always wanting something, always desiring a yet-beyond. But if you

place a Christian in trouble you will find that he does not want gold then—that he does not want carnal honour—then he only wants his God. I suppose he is like a sailor, when he sails along smoothly he loves to have fair weather, and wants this and that to amuse himself on the deck. But when the winds blow all he wants is the haven. He does not desire anything else. The biscuit may be moldy, but he does not care. The water may be brackish, but he does not care. He does not think of it in the storm. He only thinks about the haven then. It is just so with the Christian; when he is going along smoothly he wants this and that comfort; he is aspiring after this position, or is wanting to obtain this and that elevation. But let him once doubt his interest in Christ—let him once get into some soul-distress and trouble so that it is very dark—and all he will feel then is, "With desire have I desired Thee in the night. " When the child is put upstairs to bed it may lie while the light is there, and look at the trees that shake against the window, and admire the stars that are coming out; but when it gets dark and the child is still awake it cries for its parent. It cannot be amused by aught else. So in daylight will the Christian look at anything. He will cast his eyes round on this pleasure and on that; but, when the darkness gathers, it is, "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me!" "O why art Thou so far from me and from the word of my roaring?"

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