

Joy in Life's Hard Times

by Charles Spurgeon

"At evening time it shall be light."

I shall not notice the particular occasion upon which these words were uttered, or try to discover the time to which they more especially refer; I shall rather take the sentence as a rule of the kingdom, as one of the great laws of God's dispensation of grace, that "at evening time it shall be light." Whenever philosophers wish to establish a general law, they think it necessary to collect a considerable number of individual instances; these being put together, they then infer from them a general rule. Happily, this need not be done with regard to God. We have no need, when we look abroad in providence, to collect a great number of incidents, and then from them infer the truth; for since God is immutable, one act of His grace is enough to teach us the rule of His conduct. Now, I find, in one place, it is recorded that, on a certain occasion, during a certain adverse condition of a nation, God promised that at evening time it should be light. If I found that in any human writing, I should suppose that the thing might have occurred once, that a blessing was conferred in emergency on a certain occasion, but I could not from it deduce a rule; but when I find this written in the Book of God, that on a certain occasion when it was evening time with His people God was pleased to give them light, I feel myself more than justified in deducing from it the rule, that always to His people at evening time there shall be light.

The Church at large has had many evening times. If I might derive a figure to describe her history from anything in this lower world, I should describe her as being like the sea. At times the abundance of grace has been gloriously manifest. Wave upon wave has triumphantly rolled in upon the land, covering the mire of sin, and claiming the earth for the Lord of Hosts. So rapid has been its progress that its course could scarce be obstructed by the rocks of sin and vice. Complete conquest seemed to be foretold by the continual spread of the truth. The happy Church thought that the day of her ultimate triumph had certainly arrived, so potent was her Word by her ministers, so glorious was the Lord in the midst of her armies, that nothing could stand against her. She was "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners." Heresies and schisms were swept away, false gods and idols lost their thrones; Jehovah Omnipotent was in the midst of His church, and He upon the white horse rode forth conquering and to conquer. Before long, however, you find it always has happened that there came an ebb-tide. Again the stream of grace seemed to recede, the poor Church was driven back either by persecution or by internal decay; instead of gaining upon man's corruptions it seemed as if man's corruptions gained on her; and where once there had been righteousness like the waves of the sea, there was the black mud and mire of the filthiness of mankind. Mournful tunes the Church had to sing, when by the rivers of Babylon she sat down and wept, remembering her former glories, and weeping her present desolation. So has it always been—progressing, retrograding, standing still a while, and then progressing once more, and falling back again. The whole history of the Church has been a history of onward marches, and then of quick retreats—a history which, I believe, is, on the whole, a history of advance and growth, but which, read chapter by chapter, is a

mixture of success and repulse, conquest and discouragement. And so I think it will be, even to the last. We shall have our sunrises, our meridian noon, and then the sinking in the west; we shall have our sweet dawns of better days, our Reformations, our Luthers and our Calvins; we shall have our bright full noon-tide, when the gospel is fully preached, and the power of God is known; we shall have our sunset of ecclesiastical weakness and decay. But just as sure as the evening-tide seems to be drawing over the Church, "at evening time it shall be light."

We may expect to see darker evening times than have ever been beheld. Let us not imagine that our civilization shall be more enduring than any other that has gone before it, unless the Lord shall preserve it. It may be that the suggestion will be realized which has often been laughed at as folly, that one day men should sit upon the arches of London Bridge, and marvel at the civilization that has departed, just as men walk over the mounds of Nimrod, and marvel at cities buried there. It is just possible that all the civilization of this country may die out in blackest night; it may be that God will repeat again the great story which has been so often told: "I looked, and lo, in the vision I saw a terrible beast, and it ruled the nations, but lo, it passed away and was not." But if ever such things should be—if the world should ever have to return to barbarism and darkness—if instead of what we sometimes hope for, a constant progress to the brightest day, all our hopes should be blasted, let us rest quite satisfied that "at evening time there shall be light," that the end of the world's history shall be an end of glory. However red with blood, however black with sin the world may yet be, she shall one day be as pure and perfect as when she was created. The day shall come when this poor planet shall find herself unrobed of those swaddling bands of darkness that have kept her lustre from breaking forth. God shall yet cause His name to be known from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof,

"And the shout of jubilee
Loud as mighty thunders roar,
Or the fulness of the sea,
When it breaks upon the shore,
Shall yet be heard the wide world o'er."

"At evening time it shall be light."

We know that in nature the very same law that rules the atom, governs also the starry orbs.

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

It is even so with the laws of grace. "At evening time it shall be light" to the Church.... Christian let us descend to lowly things. Thou hast had thy bright days in temporal matters: thou hast sometimes been greatly blessed: thou canst remember the day when the calf was in the stall, when the olive yielded its fruit, and the fig-tree did not deny its harvest; thou canst recollect the years when the barn

was almost bursting with the corn, and when the vat overflowed with the oil; thou rememberest when the stream of thy life was deep, and thy ship floated softly on, without one disturbing billow of trouble to molest it. Thou saidst in those days, "I shall see no sorrow; God hath hedged me about; He hath preserved me; He hath kept me; I am the darling of His providence; I know that all things work together for my good, for I can see it is plainly so. "

Well, Christian, thou hast after that had a sunset; the sun which shone so brightly, began to cast his rays in a more oblique manner every moment, until at last the shadows were long, for the sun was setting, and the clouds began to gather; and though the light of God's countenance tinged those clouds with glory, yet it was waxing dark. Then troubles lowered o'er thee; thy family sickened, thy wife was dead, thy crops were meagre, and thy daily income was diminished, thy cupboard was no more full, thou wast wondering for thy daily bread; thou didst not know what should become of thee, mayhap thou wast brought very low; the keel of thy vessel did grate upon the rocks; there was not enough bounty to float thy ship above the rocks of poverty. You used both industry and economy, and you added thereunto perseverance; but all in vain. It was in vain that you rose up early, and sat up late, and ate the bread of carefulness; nothing could you do to deliver yourself, for all attempts failed. You were ready to die in despair. You thought the night of your life had gathered with eternal blackness. You would not live always, but had rather depart from this vale of tears. Was it not light with thee at evening time? The time of thine extremity was just the moment of God's opportunity. When the tide had run out to its very furthest, then it began to turn; thine ebb had its flow; thy winter had its summer; thy sunset had its sunrise; "at evening time it was light." On a sudden by some strange work of God as thou didst think then, thou was completely delivered. He brought out thy righteousness like the light, and thy glory as the noonday. The Lord appeared for thee in the days of old; He stretched out His hand from above; He drew thee out of deep waters; He set thee upon a rock and established thy goings.

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