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### Light in the Great Darkness

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# LIGHT IN GREAT

Someone has said, "The darker the cloud, the better the rainbow." Although only a poetic figure of speech, this holds much meaning to any who have experienced dark moments in life. The striking contrast between the warm, soft spectrum of color arched against the cold, heavy blackness of a storm cloud is enough to encourage and uplift one's feelings. It is even more comforting to realize that behind the rainbow is the Father of lights, with whom there is no shadow of darkness (see James 1:17). Here is the outreach of a faith that as the hymn writer observes,

"Shines more bright—more clear  
When tempests rage without,  
That when in danger knows no fear,  
In darkness feels no doubt."

In essence this was the intent of Isaiah's prophecy of light for Israel's darkness, the only light that can dispel the deep blackness that presses in all around us.

According to early chapters in the book of Isaiah, darkness was deepening all across Israel. The dreaded Assyrian was already sweeping swiftly down through the little states of Palestine. The stark shadow of captivity would shortly fall upon every home. Soon God's people would be herded along a dusty path to prisons worse than death, home and happiness behind them, the curse of captivity before them, a disappointed, brokenhearted God above them.

Isaiah sees a people filled with anxiety, cursing their king, the weak and wicked Ahaz who had betrayed them, and the God they thought had abandoned them. Already they had turned to morbid forms of religion, to chirping and muttering spirit mediums. The prophet sees the gathering dimness and the gloom of anguish. He sees his people disappearing into darkness, groping in ignorance, sin, and sorrow. Notice his language!

"And they shall pass through it, hardly bestead and hungry: and it shall come to pass, that when they shall be hungry, they shall fret themselves, and curse their king and their God, and look upward. And they shall look unto the earth; and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness" (Isa. 8:21, 22).

Compassion grips the prophet's great heart. His next words are intended to move his people from despair to hope and from hope to individual salvation.

"Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian. For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire" (chap. 9:1-5).

The nation about to be mutilated will again be multiplied. The joy of harvest is to replace the growing pangs of hunger. Defeat is to be turned into overwhelming victory. How could all these direct opposites occur?

Never by new methods, stronger armies, new principles of progress; not through any evolution in society; not through any abstraction of manipulation by men, but through a Person.

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (verse 6).

Here is light in darkness! Isaiah's intent here may be summed up in the words "His name shall be called Light." God's people needed more than food, more than relief from their enemies, more than a trustworthy king or a thriving kingdom. They needed something within—a living faith. Isaiah sought to direct that faith toward the coming Messiah, Emmanuel, "God with us."

It is startling to hear from the lips of one who rigidly believed in One God, the names ascribed to the other One to be born among men. These names are worthy of our most careful consideration because of what they meant to God's people who looked forward to Messiah's coming; and for what they can mean to us in discovering more about our Lord and Saviour.

"His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor." Into man's darkness comes the light of God's counsel, the light that lighteth every man. The One acquainted with the mind of God from eternity in a way we are not able to comprehend comes through incarnation to reveal His principles, His purposes and plans.

He counsels man that he may believe in the love and mercy of God. He makes plain the way for rebels to come home. He sets forth the need of a childlike open spirit, of humility for understanding the truth and righteousness. His statements concerning life after death and the coming kingdom of glory are wonderful and unaccountable except that God was in Him and He in God. He spoke with conscious authority reconciling and counseling the world.

How encouraging to know that all of His counsel may be relied on implicitly. All of us can have His direction, and as we follow it we will not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.

# DARKNESS



His name shall be called "The mighty God." Into man's dark weakness comes the light of God's power. The Hebrew tongue speaks here of Messiah's power in the sense that He would have the ability to carry through all that He had undertaken and through His life and death save man to the uttermost. Nothing less than this might and power could redeem man, could overcome sin and death, could overrule in the affairs of men, or could triumph over evil. Only God, the mighty One, possessed power to gain and hold the attention of rebelling human hearts and to bring spiritual revolution through changed lives without perverting man's power to choose.

His name shall be called "The everlasting Father." Into man's dark loneliness comes the waiting Father—God revealing Himself fully through earthly relationships. He did not take on Him the nature of angels, but of man. Yet men may be men of power, to be feared, obeyed, and served. Men may play many roles that affect human relationships. As a man the Lord came to reveal none of these, but to reveal God as a Father, the everlasting Father.

He showed us in His life the qualities that say to Philip and all doubters, He that studies Me has seen the character of the Father. The Lord sought at all times to awaken sonship in men by telling them of their heavenly Father. In His teaching He paints a picture of a rebel son pressing against his father's bosom, heart beating against heart, the son's heart filled with penitence, the father's heart pounding with pity.

His name shall be called "The Prince of Peace." Into man's restlessness comes the abiding quietness backed by a providence that says, "Hitherto the pressures, and no further." Our Lord brought no superficial smoothness for peace. He was a disturber of the kind of peace men wanted. His peace was given to bridge the separation between God and man. It was to bring rest by making all things new within, all powers used in harmony with the revealed will of God. His peace within enables the one who possesses it to handle life's problems.

Upon the shoulders and the heart of the One named Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace, was placed the kingdom of God of which Isaiah speaks.

"Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this" (verse 7).

The life blood of Isaiah's messianic prophecy is the conviction that the kingdom of righteousness will outlast sin, and will finally fill the world. Looking at all Isaiah speaks of in a few short sentences, one is compelled to echo the prophet's words: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."

What a picture of steadfast love always coming into sharpest focus when men think God has done all He will or can do for an ungrateful people. Here God speaks to those despairing of hope and surprises rebel and prophet alike with this new revelation of His concern and love.

In the fullness of time God sent the Light, His Son, into the darkness that filled the world. The dark shadow the

Through the darkness of the twentieth century shines a Light brighter than that which illumined the path of ancient Israel two and a half millenniums ago.

evil one had spread over the world grew deeper and still deeper. Sin became a science, and man's hostility became violent against heaven. The heathen world worshiped their own conceptions and lost all knowledge of God. Israel was following the principle that man can save himself by his own works. Darkness filled their souls. At the time when evil seemed about to plunge the world into total darkness, light broke through, and with it salvation.

We come to a time when darkness is again closing in on God's creation. Deceived and bewildered, men and women are moving in gloomy procession toward eternal ruin, to death that offers no hope of life, toward night on which dawns no morning. Yet even today the light pierces the darkness that cannot overcome it. Soon that light is to shine forth in the heavens in all the brightness of its glory.

Why do not more in the dark world come to the light? H. Wheeler Robinson tells of standing in the back of a church, listening to a great choir singing, "Lamb of God, who takest away the sin of the world, have mercy on us." Robinson noticed a man standing beside him twisting his hat in his hands like a rag. Suddenly he muttered audibly, "O God! O God! What a dream, if only He could! If only He could!" With that the man turned and ran from the church. He went away refusing to be touched.

Is it possible in that church or in other similar Christian churches that members are not showing in their daily lives a practical belief and faith in Christ as Wonderful Counsellor, mighty God, everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace?

Our sensitive feelings are so easily clouded over by little trials, misunderstanding, daily happenings, and decisions by those around us. If we worship in full faith, accepting all the strength worship can bring, then go forth to trust even though we feel forsaken, to keep crying out into heaven when no voice seems to return, to "see the machinery of the world pauselessly grinding on as if self-moved, caring for no life, nor shifting a hair breadth for all entreaty"; if we yet believe that God is light, that He lives, and that He is utterly loving; if we desire nothing but what comes for us from His hand, patiently fearing only lest faith should fail, what would happen in a dark world?

If this can be our experience, many people who walk in great darkness will come to Christ and walk with us in great light toward the kingdom.

# *The Art of Living.....* when **you're young**

## It Needn't Be Traumatic

**I**N SUMMER, back in your home church, it's likely that there'll be times when you're confused by apparent conflicts between what your fellow church members believe about God, the Bible, and religion, and what you've studied in school. This can lead to serious doubts, and even to a rejection by you of values that have always stood you in good stead. And then you're miserable and very likely to be argumentative, because you feel the need of "straightening everybody out."

This problem can be especially acute if you're a member of a very small church, have been away at school, and are now seeing the church and church members through newly sophisticated eyes. Things seem so hopelessly archaic! Nothing is modern, including the concepts of the church members. So you entertain doubts about religion in general.

Well, perhaps we can set up a few basic guide lines for dealing with doubts of this kind. First, even though you've done some studying and encountered some new ideas, it is unlikely that you have all the facts. Studying in depth takes a great many years. Scholars—and there aren't many people to whom this title can be applied unreservedly—find that the more they study, the more humble they become, probably because they have discovered how much there is *yet* to be learned. Therefore, a young Christian needs to be wary of making judgments based on insufficient evidence. When *all* the facts are studied, you'll find that there isn't the disharmony that seemed at first so glaring.

### A Second Guideline

A second guide line could be the thought that some of the mysteries of God will probably never be fully understood by the puny minds of mortals. I, for one, don't believe it's necessary for everything to be "an open book." I'm not implying that you should dismiss all difficult-to-understand ideas with a wave of your hand. Your mind was given to you to be used. But keen though it may be, it's a human mind, not a superhuman one.

Now about your relations with your home church. You may experience some pretty definite feelings of superiority as you observe the simplicity, the halting speech, occasional grammatical errors, and what seems to you a lack of "depth" in some of the church "pillars." (I hope your better nature

will rise up and say, "Aren't you ashamed of yourself?") This certainly is the time to think analytically, and to adopt a set of attitudes, among which might be the following:

1. Education is not just a matter of books. People who haven't had the opportunity for much formal education may still possess a great deal of wisdom. There's an old expression that fits in here—"Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers." Qualities such as understanding human nature, dependability, and compassion are deserving of great admiration. And I've observed that these qualities are often found in abundance in small churches.

2. Religion doesn't have to be interpreted *exactly* the same way by everyone. But true religion involves faith. So ask yourself if you have as much faith as the staunch, home-church members who've "stayed by the stuff" year after year? And have you as much reliability as those who keep the church clean (there isn't money to hire service of this kind in some places), come early to open the building before every service, go out Ingathering day after day until the *church* goal is reached? If you're arguing mentally that these pursuits aren't theological, my reply would be, Who's to say? The Lord's work is a tangible thing, carried on, of necessity, by human beings. Each one serves where he can best fit in, if he's a sincere Christian.

I'm suggesting that there's no reason why returning to your little home church need be a traumatic experience for you. It can be a most rewarding experience if you approach it with maturity and insight. It may even help you sort out the confusion that sometimes reigns in your heart and mind. With the proper attitude you can end the summer a much better person for having entered wholeheartedly into your home-church program.

You might consider the fact that the faithful members may feel a bit wistful because they didn't have opportunities to broaden their horizons, opportunities that are yours. They aren't to be looked down upon by you or by anyone else. The great English poet, John Milton, phrased it in ringing tones: "They also serve who only stand and wait."