

# FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

## A SERMON

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“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” 2 Corinthians 4:6

THESE is a universal tendency among men, either themselves to try to have some hand in the work of the Holy Ghost, or else to set others about it. All this is nothing else but the inroad of Satan, to hide from the minds of men the freeness and the order of the gospel of Christ. Hence the apostle said, “If our gospel be hid” take notice of that, “our gospel;” and you know what kind of gospel the apostle Paul preached, “if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.” And of all calamities that can overtake us, none can equal that of being lost, lost by sin, lost by death, lost by the sentence of the law, lost by almighty and eternal wrath. But while all are in a lost condition, there are some that shall not be lost; for just as the Lord said, “Let there be light, and there was light,” just so now, when the Lord intends to convert a soul from death, he commands the light of eternal life to enter into that man’s soul, and makes that man just what God from eternity decreed to make him; makes the man just that that fits him to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in everlasting light. Had any creature, pray, any hand in bringing the light upon this chaotic globe at the first? No; there was no earthly creature in existence when the Lord said, “Let there be light, and there was light.” And there is no spiritual existence now, there is no new creature in existence now, until the Lord form that new creature by ministering to it the light of life! “And the Lord saw that the light was good;” and if that be true of the light that lightens this world, how much more is it true of that light that lightens us with the light of everlasting life! “And God divided the light from the darkness, so he does now; he divides the children of light from the children of darkness. The children of light are brought into the light, and that severs them from the children of darkness; and being thus severed from the children of darkness, they walk in the light even as God is in the light: God is in Christ; they walk in Christ; he is their light, affording them every light that they can need while they live, when they die, and that forever. “And the light he called Day,” meaning action, labor, prosperity. The original word is very significant, “the light he called Day.” And so, the day is the time for work. When a soul is born of God, it begins to work, works in the day, and walks in the day; and with such the night will never come, for there is no night in that happy land into which the Christian is brought. And the darkness “he called Night;” meaning that that turns

away from the sun; that is the meaning of the word “night.” And so, all the children of night turn away from the light of God’s truth; they love darkness rather than light. Wherever the light of truth comes, that is, where it is not attended by divine power, these men are like the bats, the owls, and the moles; just visual power enough to see enough of the truth to hate it, and so they turn away from it; not so those in whose hearts the Lord is pleased to command the light to shine. I am, therefore, come this morning with the same assurance I have had for a great many years, that the work of conversion, saving conversion of the soul to God, is as exclusively, as independently, and sovereignly the work of God as it was the work of God to create the world, and as it was the work of the God-man to accomplish eternal salvation. And so far from man helping in his own eternal salvation, the living God meets with more hindrance in the man that he undertakes to save than he does in anything else. There lies all the hindrance. If we who are saved could have hindered our salvation, we would; if we could have gone the wrong way, held fast error, and have gone the way that would have ruined us at last, instead of being brought, as we now are, to God’s truth, if we could have done it we would. We worked hard enough for that, some of us. But God plunged one into Job’s ditch, another into Jonah’s hell, put another into the desert, another into the wood, another into the fire; he brought us out of the whole, and made us feel at last, that if we ever got to heaven it must be by the gospel of the grace of God, and by the grace of the gospel.

Our text, then, though rather long, I shall notice in two parts: the first is *saving illumination*; secondly, *its design*: “to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” Now wherever there is real conversion, there is sure to be light. A converted man will, sooner or later, become a rightly illuminated man. If a man be seemingly a converted man, but not an illuminated man, then the truth remains hidden from him, and he is a lost man, notwithstanding his profession. On the other hand, if a man come over to the truth itself in the letter of it, by mere opinion, then that man is illuminated, but not regenerated. So, what we want this morning is, to describe that kind of light where the conversion is real. I will give samples of the same. I take, in the first place, such a revelation of God in his holiness and in his glory as to exclude every other object, and to shut you up with God in his holiness, to shut you up with God in the revelation of his eternal glory; and at the same time you shall feel that that holiness must be to you a consuming fire, and unto that glory you will never come. That’s the feeling. “I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.” And the theme of his attendants, the seraphim’s, fiery ones, representatives of ministers of the gospel, who are to be as a flame of fire, their theme was the supernal holiness of the Most High. “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” God attended their testimony with power, and it shook the threshold and the posts of the house where the prophet was. And so, where this light enters, where this conviction is, it shakes a sinner’s heart, and soul, and mind, and sometimes, I was going to say, his body too. He says, Here am I, shut up with the holiness of God; how shall I meet the holiness of God? Why, I am everything that is unclean, unholy; I am lost, condemned, damned, rejected, excluded, cast out, cast down; woe, woe, woe is me! for I am undone. Here is the conviction. My hearer, what know you of being brought into this secret place of thunder? What know you of thus seeing your sins set, not as Satan would set them, but as God would set them, in their true character in the light of his countenance? What know you of thus seeing God, and seeing yourself as a sinner, and what know you of every other subject connected with your existence being a mere trifle in comparison of this awful state you are in as a sinner? “What shall it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” Here was the prophet, then, shut up, as it were, with God, with his holiness. As it has been in all ages, so it was with Saul of Tarsus. God

took him, as it were, into the revelation of his holiness, and then Saul trembled as he never trembled before; saw sin as he never saw it before. But not only was the law the theme of the Seraphim's; they had another theme besides the law. Not only was Jehovah thrice holy: here is the voice of the law, Take the sinner, cut him up root and branch; then comes the voice of the gospel, "The whole earth is full of his glory;" not the earth we inhabit, but the new earth. It is a metonymical form of speech, the container mentioned, but the contained meant; and therefore, the meaning properly is, "The whole church is full of his glory." Oh, what a happy people that church! what an assembly, what a congregation, what a nation! oh, what a happy people! I see them rise from the regions of sin, and death, and damnation; I see them enter the promised land; I see them enthroned in glory; I see Jehovah on their side; I see them in their fulness of joy, pleasures for evermore; but I shall never reach that happy place; I shall never be one of these happy people. Ah, happy man, though you know it not. Did you always thus see your lost condition? No. Did you always thus see the blessedness of the people whose God is the Lord, and wish to be one? No; it is something new. And while he was trembling, ruminating, fearing; seeking, despairing, and thinking nothing but hell was before him, "then flew one of the seraphim." A minister always goes with more elasticity, with more delight, with more power, when he has a message of pardoning mercy, because he generally tastes the fruits himself which he has to take to others. Go, seraphim; you are burning with love to God, you are burning with love to man, you are burning with love to the truth, you are burning with love to God's glory; go, and add another trophy to his grace, add another gem to his crown, add another child to his family, another sheep to his flock, another to the great assembly; go, and let the poor trembling sinner know what his happy lot is. "Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal" (living truth); not a dead one; he was not a dead-letter, duty-faith parson, a collegiate gentleman, a well-read gentleman; oh no. "Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand," representing the living, penetrating, heartwarming, shall I say the soul-burning truth, setting the soul on fire? "a live coal from off the altar; and he laid it upon my mouth." Now it would be absurd to take that literally, because a burning coal upon his mouth would burn him; you must therefore take it spiritually, mystically, in the proper sense. I name this in order that you may be sure it has a spiritual meaning. Isaiah said, "woe is me!" What's the matter? I have nothing but iniquity I can call my own, I have nothing but sin I can call my own; my very lips are unclean; how shall I take upon my lips that pure name in which these seraphim seem so happy? "This has touched your lips, and your iniquity is taken away;" as far away as God the Father could put it, by transferring it to his dear Son; as far as Jesus, by his infinite perfection, could roll your iniquities away; as far away as the Holy Spirit shall roll them; for "as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed your transgressions from you." "Your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged." Here's the live coal from the altar, the sacrificial altar; here's pardon, here's mercy, here's illumination. This prophet, then, knew the law well, and he knew the gospel well. And you all know how wonderfully Isaiah, after this, was favored; what revelations the Lord granted unto him. And now, when he is thus enlightened to recognize his condition as a sinner, made to tremble at the same, realizes mercy, the Lord says, "Who will go for us? Here am I; send me. Lord, what will you have me to do?" Is there anything, Lord, any place I can take in your house, any position I can occupy, that shall be expressive of gratitude unto your blessed name? Hence, then, it is not right that we should be content to assemble here from sabbath to sabbath, and get, as it were, three parts asleep; and if we have a comfortable place to meet in, and are pretty comfortable, there stop. No; let us look around at the thousands perishing for lack of knowledge; let us ask how a kind Providence has dealt with us; whether we have it in our power to consecrate a part of what he has given, to his honor, to his service, to the furtherance of the gospel, to the

good of souls, and to the glory of God, That's the language of the man whose conversion is real. Why, one of old, when thus the light of eternity shone into his soul, and salvation was come to his house, the best thing that could come to his house, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him four-fold." Here, then, is light, here is religion, here is reality. The Savior went about doing good; and so, Christians should never, I was going to say, stand still. And we do not mean to stand still. God helping us, we hope to go forward, and have the happiness of seeing hundreds around us, yet brought into that light which is the light of eternal life. That's one sample, then, of vital conversion, shut up solemnly, under a solemn apprehension of the contrast between yourself and God, seeing the glory of his people, and fearing you shall never reach it, and there standing until you realize pardoning mercy; then, when that mercy is realized, love will constrain you, will make your cheerful feet in swift obedience move to do whatever God in his providence shall enable you. Just look at it, here, what you have done here, a little, few people like this. In about ten months you have got in actual cash in the bank, towards a new chapel, two thousand five hundred pounds, and a thousand more promised from those we think will keep their promises. In ten months, you have done this, with the exception of about fifty pounds from other churches. Well, you have not been asleep, then; you have been at work; you have been saying, "Here am I, send me." Bless the Lord for a working people. I wouldn't stop among you another month if you were not a working people; no, if you had not remembered the poor, and the cause of God, and have done as you have, you would not have had me, I can tell you; no. If I am an officer, I will be an officer of an honorable regiment, of a heroic battalion, of those that never back out; for "my soul shall have no pleasure in him that draws back." "Speak to the people, that they go forward." Never mind the rolling sea; never mind the Red Sea, nor the blue sea, nor the black sea; God is there to make a way, and if the Lord of hosts be with us, everything must give way before us, and our song as we pass along will be unto the Lord who has showed us light, and in that light we shall rejoice, for it is a sun that will never go down.

Again, an angel, but this I advance as an opinion; it is perhaps all but bare assumption on my part, but men have their opinions, and I throw my opinion in, an angel appeared in the East; and being a fiery angel, bright with holiness, bright with purity and perfection, bright with the rays of heaven, bright with burning zeal for God, that angel had the appearance of a star. And that angel did instrumentally, by the power of God, lay hold of the minds of a few people, and draw them along, and they couldn't help following. Just so it is now; the man that's sent of God lays hold of a poor sinner, draws him along; says he, Can't help following my minister; must go after him. "You became followers of us, and of the Lord Jesus Christ." Here's the light, then. And I was going to say they came to Jerusalem to join the church; said, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" Well, we don't know. You are a pretty church, then, you don't know! Why, we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him. Well, we don't know him. And yet you call yourselves Israelites, and don't know Jesus Christ, don't know the King of the Jews. And this disturbed the people very much; they were all very happy till these enlightened people came. "What is the matter?" says Herod. "Why, your majesty, here is another king." "Is there?" And Herod was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. So, tidings out of the East troubled Herod. He's a part of the man of sin, tidings out of the East troubled him first, and then tidings out of the north, when God's judgments came upon him, troubled him afterwards. Depend upon it if the oriental tidings trouble you, the northern tidings shall trouble you; if the tidings of the gospel be a trouble to you, instead of being a delight to you, then you are left to the northern blasts of God's almighty wrath at the

last. Well, they lost sight of the star for a time; of course; yes. People tell me I mustn't go to hear that man; I must go to hear something more respectable, more fashionable, more pleasing. The people of God are foolish enough to do that sometimes; but they are, like the prodigal, glad enough to come back again at last. Now what are we to do? We must go to Bethlehem. So, then they set out again. Faithful angel, faithful messenger, faithful star, held in the right hand of Him that is faithfulness itself; Jesus holds all the stars in his right hand. Ah, here's the messenger again, here's the star again, here's the fight again. And they rejoiced with exceeding joy. And this angel knew where the king was, and when it was, and who it was, and all about it, and went and stood over where the young child was. And so they were thus drawn along until they came into that line of things set forth in the 5th of Micah, which I must enter into presently, after I have just reminded you, must have a little digression here again, that when they had come to him they were so delighted, must be doing something; they gave unto him, here it is, gifts; gold, not silver, but gold; they did not think silver was good enough; and frankincense, and myrrh; expensive oriental spices, and worshipped him. And Herod hoped to have ensnared them, put them to death, and the young child too; but in both he was disappointed; for being warned of God in a dream, they went into their own country another way, another way. Now then, Christian, here's something for you. Are you in trouble, and you are looking for deliverance to come after a certain order, or in a certain way? If you are disappointed, let not that discourage you; for the Lord will bring you into your own country another way. Hence said Mordecai to Esther, "If you at this time altogether hold your peace, then enlargement and deliverance shall arise from another place." Rest assured of this one thing (and I speak from pretty solemn experience) whatever trouble you have, God will appear; in what way I know not, from what quarter I know not, by what means I know not; but if you are sighing and oppressed, and in trouble, he will appear. That has always appeared to me so very significant; "they departed into their own country another way." Ah, my hearer, in how many respects have we been supported, and blessed, and supplied, in ways we never thought of, and the ways we have thought of have been closed up; the gourds we have put ourselves under have been blasted; the ships into which we have gone have been broken to pieces, and have sent off to get where we can; but they escaped all safe to land. Deliverance shall then come another way. So, then, if we are thus brought into this light, reconciled to God, then he is our friend; I make no apology for this digression. Now what do you suppose would be the line of truth that these wise men would be brought into? I will show you the line of truth into which they were brought; and hundreds in this assembly can from happy experience fall in with the same. And you will say, Well, if their conversion was real, and it brought them into those truths, then mine must be real; I am brought into the same truths; I love the same divine revelation. Perhaps some may suspect whether these men from the East had the Scriptures or not at that time, the Old Testament Scriptures; I think they had, for providentially two hundred and seventy-seven years before the coming of Christ, under one of the Ptolemies, kings of Egypt, the Hebrew Scriptures were, by seventy of the Jews, translated into the Greek language, which was the most popular language at that time of western Asia, and extended also, in its general use, a long way into eastern Asia. So that the Scriptures became by that circumstance two hundred and seventy-seven years before the coming of Christ very widely circulated. See what a providence this was. Now a few years after these wise men, there came a man from the same direction, east, or south-east, rather, somewhere in that direction; he was riding in his chariot, and he was reading Esaias the prophet. He had the Scriptures, you see; yes, the Greek language had found its way up into these regions, as the result of the conquests of Alexander the Great; so that the doings of wholesale murderers shall nevertheless be made subservient to the furtherance of the counsels and designs of the most high

God. I therefore infer that these wise men had the Old Testament, and that they had read the 24th of Numbers, and that they saw there the prophesying of a star that should come, meaning a ruler; and the angel appeared in a form that exactly answered to that prophecy. And so, ministers are represented as ambassadors of Christ, representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ; and the more they are like him the better; the less the world will like them, and the more the church will like them.

Now we may suppose these men going back again, and one saying to another, Let us now read what we have found; let us unroll the parchment. What have we found? Something wonderful. Angels sang at this birth; shepherds saw him before we did. What have we found? They read on, "Bethlehem," why, here it is; "his goings forth" the goings forth of that person that we have seen, "were from of old, even from everlasting." Why, he must be God; why, we have seen God; we have seen God, and the Son of God; we have seen the Son of God, we have seen God, we have seen the King of Israel; why, he is to be Ruler in Israel; his goings forth were from of old, even from everlasting. Why, we have found eternity, an eternity of mercy, an eternity of blessedness. Wondrous star! Blessed star! If we could see that angel again, that star, would we not tell him how we are delighted at the wondrous revelation made? But that star is gone to where we hope to go, to the regions of the blest. And he is to be a governor; what sort of a government is it? I can almost see them reading; I can see one reading and see the other listening; and sometimes they stop and stand and read, and sometimes they sit down, can't forget it. "He shall" here comes his government, "he shall stand and feed," that is, rule and govern kindly; govern them by feeding them; govern them by giving them meat in due season; by giving them their daily bread; by leading them into green pastures, and beside the still waters; by causing them to sit down under the apple tree in the midst of the wood, and finding the fruit thereof sweet unto their taste; govern them by bringing them into the banqueting-house, and waving the banner of everlasting love over their heads; "in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty," the sovereignty and authority, "of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall abide." Who? They that are brought to receive him as king, they shall abide. Why, brother, the kingdom is forever, you see. They shall abide; how shall they abide? By their goodness? No, no; I would say that loud enough to split the roof of this chapel almost if I could; no; they are to abide not by their goodness, but by his greatness. "Now shall they abide; for now, shall he be great unto the ends of the earth." Meet with something greater than he is, then you may sever his sheep from his hands, but not before: meet with something greater than he is, then his subjects may despair of the power of their king, but not before. Thus, what have we found? Eternity. What have we found? Kindest king that ever lived. What have we found? The strongest king that ever was; he is the only king that has immortality; all other kings die, and their kingdoms come to nothing, but here is a king forever lives, his kingdom rules over all, and never shall be either destroyed or moved. Well, how shall we get on again? "And this man" the word *man* is not in the original; I almost wish our translators had not given it there, I think it is better without it, "and this," that is, this order of things, "shall be the peace;" not but what Jesus Christ himself is the peace; "when the Assyrian shall come into our land;" the Assyrian representing the enemy; whether sin, or individuals, or circumstances; let it be whatever they may. "And when he shall tread in our palaces," and try and put us out. Come into our palaces, what, have you got into that election? Yes, sir, I have come in to bring you out. What, have you got into that predestination? Yes. I am come to advise you to come out. No; the grace of God alone put me there, and by the grace of God I am still kept there. What, you have come into that perfect mediation, have you? I am come to tell you to do your part. Ah, it's all done. So, you are come into "whom he justified, them he also glorified," are you? Yes, sir, I am come to bring you out. I should like, sir, to see you

come in. Oh, I would not go into such a dangerous place. And I would not go out of such a safe place for the world. Well, what business have you there? We will bring in the testimony of the apostles to show what business we have there. "Then shall we raise against him seven shepherds, and eight principal men;" "seven shepherds," a definite number for an indefinite; that is, they shall bring in the testimonies of the apostles. Take one apostle, take Paul, take the 1st of Ephesians; there are the palaces. Take the 1st chapter of the first Epistle to Peter; the same sort; strong analogy between the 1st of Ephesians and the 1st of Peter; and we bring these in. These are heavenly palaces, and we dwell in them; that's where we dwell for shelter, for everything. How I sigh and mourn before God to dwell there more! God is in these heavenly truths, these palaces, for a refuge. Palaces for the royal family, for those that are kings and priests unto our God; there are royal diadems, royal robes, royal relations, and everything infinitely beyond anything this earth can afford. And what shall these seven shepherds and eight principal men, or ministers, do? "They shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword not the literal sword, friends, but the sword of the Spirit. Here's the enemy, and he says, I have a very nice town here, this Corinth, very nice town; they all worship me, they all respect me, and I have seven or eight and twenty gods here to represent me. That's the land of Assyria, that's the land of Nimrod. Presently in comes one of these shepherds with the sword of the Spirit, and routs the devil out, and then the people thought they would rout the shepherd out; and they took him, treated him rather roughly. So, after Paul had been hard at work all day, the Lord came to him at night, and said, "Paul." Yes, Lord, I am here. The devil does not like my being here, Lord; and you have already spoiled a good deal of his territory here; you have brought many, many souls here to know your name; you have opened their eyes, Lord, brought them from darkness into light, and from the power of Satan unto God, and they have received forgiveness of sins, and they know they shall have an inheritance among them that are sanctified. Well, Paul, I have much people in this city. Very well, Lord, I will work fast enough. And so, he did, why, says the devil, that Paul will spoil my land; I did very well till he came. Ah, so it is; I say so it is. The gospel is the sword of the Spirit, and the Lord enables his ministers so to wield it as to waste the land of Assyria, and to take souls out of the territories of hell, and bring them to Zion, to the light of that sun that shall never go down, and to serve him who is worthy to be praised. Now these wise men would say, what have we found? Found eternity, and we have found the kindest king that ever was, the greatest king that ever was, and palaces to dwell in; and we see the progress of the gospel, we see others besides ourselves; for Gentiles shall come to his light, kings unto the brightness of his rising.

Well, they go on again, and one says to the other, I rather think this is the sovereignty of God that has distinguished us like this. Well, another said, Brother, don't go too far. Another says, Well, I don't know, I think it is the sovereignty of God. But still the one says we should not have seen the king if we hadn't come. No, and we should not have come if the star had not brought us. Oh, I forgot that. Well, I'll tell you what, brother; let us read on in the same chapter and see what it says. Well, says one, I believe it is entirely the sovereign will and mercy and pleasure of God that has been pleased thus to favor us. Well, brother, you are going a long way, and unless there is something in the Scriptures connected with Bethlehem to prove that, I don't think I shall believe you. "The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that stops not for man, nor waits for the sons of men." Do you see now, brother? Well, if that's it, I will be an out-and-out hyper, for there it is, there the matter is settled; I will now sing that the Lord God omnipotent reigns; I will now sing that his counsel shall stand, that he will do all his pleasure, and that he had mercy upon us because he would have mercy upon

us. Sovereignty, why, that's just what I am brought to. Well, then, their conversion was real; and if you are brought into the same truths in understanding and experience, and in the love of them, then your conversion is real; and as those men are now in heaven, you will be in heaven. Again, I have not got to the end yet. Look, then, what have we found? Treasure after treasure. Go on again, brother; perhaps there is something more yet. Why, there can't be anything more; we have got eternity, and his kindness, and his greatness, and peace, and the progress of the gospel; and you have God in his sovereignty; as he did not love you for your goodness, he won't leave you for your badness, what more would you have? Well, might as well go on, brother. Well, I will. "The remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people as a lion;" as bold as a lion. What, are they to thunder like lions? Why, to be sure they are. There is the Lion of the tribe of Judah; and they are to speak with a thundering voice which shall make the old lion of hell glad to fly before them. Their voice shall roll, their testimony shall come like mighty thundering into the hearts and souls of sinners. "As a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep;" or, as I prefer the marginal reading, "among the flocks of goats;" "who, if he go through, both treads down and tears in pieces, and none can deliver." That's their character, sir. Oh, what have we found? We are more than conquerors, then, through him who has thus loved us. Read on, brother, read on; read on brother. So, I will; be silent. "Your hand shall be lifted up upon your adversaries, and all your enemies shall be cut off;" the last enemy is death; that's cut off and cut off forever.

Thus, then, he who commanded the light to shine out of darkness has shined in our hearts; he has given that command to Christ, and Christ is that light; he has made us one with Isaiah, one with these wise men, one with his truth, one with himself; therefore it is that he is our strength and our portion forever.