

LIGHT, DARKNESS, AND LIGHT

A SERMON

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“Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God has hedged in?” Job 3:23

THE natural tendency of tribulation is to drive to rebellion. But it is one thing, as we say, to be in trouble, and another thing to be out of trouble. And when this trouble first came upon Job, the trouble here recorded, and he had in the process of that trouble the shining presence of the Lord, he saw so much of his glory that he felt very little of the loss, great as it was, that he had sustained; so that in the presence and strength of the Lord he could say, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” But let the clouds intervene, and let Job be left to what he naturally is, he will then show that he possesses the same weakness that all the people of God do. And the Lord our God heals the wound and heals the infirmity of his people. He does not deny them the right and privilege of speaking out what they really feel. Some have said, that have never been in the path of this spiritual tribulation, connected with other tribulations, they have said, “How wrong it was in Job to curse the day of his birth!” Well, the answer to that is simply this: What is there in human nature, when that human nature is put to the test, that is not wrong? Is it not all wrong together? Is not every faculty of the soul perverted by sin, and is not nature itself a kind of combination of weaknesses, of rebellions, of sin, and of infirmity? And supposing the Old and New Testament saints had not been allowed honestly to have confessed what they felt, they would not have marked out the pathway very dearly for us; for their confessions of what they felt often bring them within our reach when nothing else could. Hence, we find here Job trying to comfort himself with the thought that he should soon die; longing for the grave, he rejoiced exceedingly that there should be an end of it all. So low do the people of God sometimes sink. And yet it is said that there was none like Job in all the earth. Now that is true of every real Christian. There are none in all the earth like the people of God. They differ, in spite of themselves, from all other people. There are many imitations of them, and Satan himself is transformed as an angel of light, and makes great pretension to Christian goodness, and his ministers as ministers of righteousness, and make great pretension to creature righteousness and creature doings; but they are but Satanic imitations after all. The people of God differ in their downward convictions of what they are from all other people. They know each the plague and grief of his own heart in a way that

others do not; they know the majesty of God's law in a way that others do not; and they know their need of God's way of salvation in a way that others do not; and they know the adaptability of God's salvation in all its departments to them in a way that others do not. Therefore, said John, when looking at this glorious standing, for "the people shall dwell alone," thus severed, John said, "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knows us not, because it knew him not." Being thus planted together in the likeness of Christ, then, the path they walk is a path which the vulture's eye has not seen, which the lion's whelps have not trodden; nor is there any natural man under the heavens capable of judging a righteous judgment in relation to the people of God; "for the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judges all things."

I will now come, then, to the language of our text, and notice the three things which appear to be here presented to us. The first is *the light*. The second is *the darkness*. The third is *the inquiry*: "Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God has hedged in?"

The first thing, then, we have to notice is *the light*. Whatever may have been the precise idea of Job when he uttered these words, I shall make use of them purely in the Christian and spiritual sense, and I shall also make use of the light that Job had to describe what it is to be savingly brought into the light or knowledge of the blessed God. Now the first representation we have here of the light that Job had was that from which the other parts of his character arose, that he was "perfect." He therefore had the light of perfection. How sweet and delightful the thought that the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ is perfect! and never, never, never can it become otherwise. We are convinced that all our righteousness's are as filthy rags; that the law is spiritual, we are carnal, sold under sin; we are led to see Christ's righteousness, and to receive the testimony of that. There is perfection; and the Christian is just as righteous one time as he is another, for the soul being born of God, it at all times rests in Christ's righteousness, and in that righteousness alone. For this word "perfection" will have, as we shall see, seven or eight, and more than that, different meanings. When you come to the atonement of Christ there you are made perfect in holiness; his atonement taking away all sin. And if we are led to understand this and to receive the testimony of this in a way that endears the Lord unto us, and prove that we receive it in the spirit of it and not in the mere letter of it, for the mere letter of it will not give rise to any particular endearment of the Lord unto us, or shed abroad in our hearts his love; but if the testimony of Christ's atonement be received in the perfection of it, so as to endear him who appointed it, to endear him who has wrought this atonement, and to endear the Holy Spirit who has revealed it, then, I say, it is a proof we have rightly received it. And that Job was acquainted with this there can be no doubt, for he offered sacrifice for his children, "and thus did Job continually;" just showing from that circumstance, as well as from many more portions of this book, that he was well acquainted with the coming Messiah, that he was well acquainted with his Redeemer that lived. Now, then, here is perfection. And I could dwell upon this part all the time we have this morning to spare, but it would not be wise to do so, or else there is something so pleasing and so delightful in it. I fear whether we ourselves fully recognize and appreciate sufficiently, for our own comfort, this blessed truth, that we are free from sin, as we stand one with him, as he is free from sin, as pure as he is pure, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. Oh! it is a great thing to recognize this. Hence, in the Old Testament, when the prophet Isaiah was sent to speak to just such poor creatures as we are, what was he sent to say when they were disconsolate and cast down?

When the Lord hides his face, and the beasts of the forest creep forth, and we feel everything is against us, we then fear that the Lord will lay our sins to our charge, and we see, if he should do so, then woe be unto us, our case would indeed be desperate. Now, when Isaiah was sent to speak comfortably unto such, what was he sent to say? And he was to say it loudly, and zealously, and lovingly, and publicly, and decisively, "Speak you comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished;" and in order to explain it if possible more clearly, he says, "that her iniquity is pardoned;" it is done, so that "we joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement:" "for she has received of the Lord's, hand double for all her sins." Now, though the word "double" there may signify "abundance," yet I have always thought that scripture in the 84th Psalm explains Isaiah's "double," for it there says that "the Lord will give grace and glory." So that in our covenant Head, having received him we receive the grace that is in him, in receiving him we receive that grace that is sufficient for us while we live; and then we are to receive the glory which we have already received in testimony, and we may already reckon that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed in us." And then, again, another scripture will, I think, beautifully explain this double which the Church has received for all her sins; that is, in the stead of, for it is a substitutional idea there, that the Lord has put something else into the place of her sins, namely, his grace and eternal glory. Another scripture says, that "in the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified," now there is grace, "justified freely by his grace," "and shall glory." Then said the apostle, "Whom he justified, them he also glorified." Now, then, here is the light of perfect righteousness, and here is the light of perfect freedom from sin. And then, again, Job was not only perfect as he stood thus, but he was also perfect prospectively. He looked forward to the time when he should be perfect personally, as Christ is. Hear what he himself said upon this: "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that he shall stand at the latter day" that is, the latter day of the Jewish dispensation, which he did "upon the earth." And he will never stand upon the earth again, for when he comes again it will be in the clouds of heaven; and we are to meet him, not at this place, that, or the other, but we are to meet him "in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." Not that he is to stand on the earth again, not that he is to have an earthly throne, not that he is to reign as an earthly king a literal thousand years, but "comfort one another with these words," that you are to meet him in the air, that you are to meet him upon the threshold of eternity, that you are to meet him where the everlasting gates will lift up their heads, where the ever-lasting doors will be thrown open; there you are to meet him. Now, then, Job, I say, understood this prospective perfection. "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth." And now comes the resurrection. "And though after my skin" the skin was already gone. What a frightful object he must have been to look at! His friends would say, and did in substance say, What an object he is! Make me believe God loves that man! Make me believe he is a favorite of heaven! Make me believe he has not done something fearfully wrong! Make me believe he is not a dreadfully wicked man! Make me believe that he is not a murderer, or something or another! Make me believe there is not something dreadful the matter! But, however, Job was right. He knew how matters were between him and God, and that God had thus dealt with him sovereignly. He knew this when in his right mind. Now he says, "Though after my skin worms destroy this body" disease has already virtually destroyed it, "yet" notwithstanding this, "in my flesh shall I see God." He shall raise me up at the last day, when there shall be no more disease, no more affliction, no more sin, no more sorrow. "Whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another," not another for me. I will name only one more sense, and that is that Job was also perfect in kind as a real believer. Hence, he says, "When he has tried me, I shall come

forth as gold.” For you observe that whatever Satan got Job to do, and whatever he did, like the rest of us, through weakness, yet Satan could not get Job to anathematize God. To curse God means to anathematize, to put away, to refuse, to repudiate, and, indeed, to detest. This is what Job could not do. What a mercy for us that we are brought into such a position that we could not do this! And some of the martyrs that did this outwardly, see how unhappy they were! Poor Bilney, in the times of Henry VIII., recanted outwardly; but he said, “What I am now suffering from this my outward recantation is ten thousand times worse to me than the flames of martyrdom; bear my existence I cannot.” He therefore came forward and declared that he had never recanted in heart, and again preached the same truths, and died triumphantly in the flames at last. So it is that God prepares some of his people for great exploits by discovering to them their weaknesses, and making them feel that they have a nature bad enough to turn them into apostates; but if they should outwardly give way, and thus appear to deny their Lord and Master, and to deny the truth, it will give them more unhappiness than can or could be inflicted upon them by all the inventions, tortures, and cruelties of men. And so, Job, in all his affliction, he could not repudiate God, could not curse God. No, he says, “My foot has held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips;” and the commandment of his lips was that I should believe in him and abide by him; “I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.” Job was therefore a perfect Christian in kind. There are two things that make up that perfection in kind. The first is sincerity. “Peace be with all them that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.” And if you know him by his truth, the Spirit of that truth, your love to him will be sincere. The second thing to show the reality of your religion is unswerving decision. Well, say you, but you have just told us that some of the martyrs, did swerve. Yes, but that was outwardly, and they could not be happy there; it was done through weakness, and the fear of man, not from any inward desire so to do; therefore, those exceptions rather prove the rule than not. Now I say unswerving decision is essential. Job abode firmly by the truth as it is in Jesus. And I am sure if we know the value of his blessed truth we shall abide firmly thereby. “When he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” Now mark that, having abode firmly by the truth, he says, “He knows the way that I take;” and not only knows it, but Job means he approves the way that I take. I take a way of hoping in him, of believing in him, of standing out for him, that he approves. And the Lord seems to bear this out when he rebukes Job’s friends afterwards. Those friends, as you are aware, spoke very Pharisaically; they spoke as though Job was nothing but a sinner, and as though they themselves had no sin at all, or, at any rate, very little. Now the Lord said unto them, “You have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job has.” Job therefore spoke out decisively. Here is the light then of this eternal perfection; perfection in righteousness, in holiness, and prospective perfection, the resurrection; perfection of character as to sincerity and decision. “They came to David with perfect hearts.” Religion is worth being decided for. Stand out; do not give way in any respect; stand out firmly; and if you stand out firmly for the truth, that is a sign and an evidence that God is standing out for you, and if he is standing out for you, and decided for you, and with you, who can do any real injury to you, be against you all the time the blessed God is for you?

Now Job was also “upright.” This I have anticipated in a measure. He so knew the value of God’s eternal truth, see his twenty-third chapter, that we read last Sunday morning but one, that he could not be otherwise than upright with it. Oh, to trifle with this, to be insincere over this, to care but little for this! No, let me die a thousand natural deaths, yes, though he slays me, and though all be gone, yet I must be upright in his blessed truth, must be decided there. And those that are not

upright there, it is because they do not know the value of God's truth. That man that is not humbled down to look for mercy in God's own sovereign covenant, mediatorial way, that man may have a great deal of natural sincerity, and a great many admirable points in his character, but he is not a Christian. "The just shall live by faith," and faith implies destitution on the part of the creature; and by faith he receives all the mercies, blessings, and grace that he needs.

And Job "feared God." That is, first, in contrast to other gods; he would not fear any other god? And so, you, do not you fear any other god, that is, not any other gospel; if you take another gospel, that gives you another god. You are not to do that. So, then, he feared no god but his own immutable God. "He is of one mind, and none can turn him." And then it means in contrast to man, he feared God rather than man. It would be a mercy for us if we could get a little more over this. There is a tendency about us all to think so much of human opinion of us; and what is it after all? It amounts to but very, very little, yes, to nothing at all of any value. For if we be sincere, and our friends see that we are, and we see that they are, we shall have a right view of each other, shall love each other, esteem each other, do all the good we can for each other and to each other, and bear each other's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. As to the opinion of the outer world, or of professors in general, oh, how unimportant it is! Fear not men, let them do their best and do their worst, it is but a very poor do after all. So that Job feared God; and happy for us to have the same grace. Also, his fearing God means that he served God, that he worshipped him, walked in his ways, delighted in his service. And he "eschewed evil;" that is, he refused the evil and chose the good. Now he "that trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm, and whose heart departs from the Lord," or the way of eternal life, "he shall be like the heath in the desert," a worthless thing, "and shall not see when good comes; but shall inhabit the parched places." So that you that know not the Lord, all your comforts will soon be parched up, your mortal life will soon be parched up. See what parched things we are when we grow old, if we live to get very old, and see how this is parched up, and the other is parched up. The fire of God's judgments is in everything under the sun; he has cursed the earth, and there is no unmixed blessedness anywhere but in Christ. "He shall not see when good comes; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land," a barren land, "and not inhabited." But he that does see the good that is in Christ, eschews the evil, and chooses the good, God's good word and God's good ways, the Lord said unto him, "You have chosen that good part that shall not be taken from you." Ah, that was a happy day when we were led to refuse to be called, as it were, the sons of Pharaoh's daughter, "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season when our feet were turned towards Sion's hill, and our souls made to delight therein. Thus, then, the people of God choose the good and refuse the evil; and they choose the good because the good has first chosen them.

But I notice, secondly, *the darkness*; "whose way is hid and whom God has hedged in." Now we will take this circumstantially as well as spiritually. First, in the spiritual sense; the soul may soon come down from the mount of transfiguration into the valley of tribulation; the soul may soon come down from full assurance into such perplexity that it knows not where it is. "Whose way is hid." We have many instances in the word of God as to the perplexities of the people of God, but you will perceive that they all got out of their trouble, and so will you. You that know not the Lord, that have no desire after him, that are not seeking him, what shall I say to you? I must say this to you, that very soon, if grace prevent not, you will fall into a trouble out of which there is no possible means or way of deliverance. You read of one that lifted up his eyes in hell; and "there is a gulf

fixed, so that he that would pass from us to you cannot, and he that would come from you to us cannot." Is there one soul here this morning on the way to such a calamity as that, to be there hidden, to be there hedged in and shut up, and that forever? God make us that know his name more and more zealous for the good of others and the glory of his name, seeing he has delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us, and will yet deliver us. But as to the Christian, I say to him, he will get into no trouble out of which he will not again get. Now the Christian, we see, sometimes gets into such a state that he says, My religion, I am afraid it is not real, it gets me into plenty of trouble. If I had been in the world, I should have been happier and easier, and more comfortable. And so, said one of old, "I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." They are not troubled like other men, they are not plagued, they seem to get on in life, and "there are no bands in their death." I almost wish really that I was one of them, I am afraid my religion is not real; it brings me plenty of sorrow, but no joy; I am afraid my profession is altogether vain. Why, therefore, have I this light when my way is thus hidden, and God has hedged me in? This, therefore, is the language in the first place of infirmity, the language of unbelief, the language of weakness. But when he went into the sanctuary of the Lord, and saw what the destiny of these prosperous men was; when he saw the destiny, on the contrary, of the Lord's Lazarus's, he was then reconciled. he says, "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before you. Nevertheless, I am continually with you: you have held me by my right hand. You shall guide me," mysterious as it is, "with your counsel, and after-ward receive me to glory." I myself am glad we have such testimonies upon record. See what a wonderful man of God Elijah was. See how he had wrought with God; look at the wonders he had performed. First, he brings a drought, he is then fed by ravens; then fed apparently out of nothing, the barrel of meal and cruse of oil; then he brings fire from heaven, then rain from heaven. a wonderful man of God. Why, he must be happy always. By-and-bye a threat from Jezebel alarms him, and he flies from the land into the wilderness. He is angry with himself for his weakness; he cannot help it. The Lord did not reproach him. What do you think of yourself, Elijah? Think of myself? I don't know what the people will think of me now. I had a good name before. Why, they will say, Elijah was frightened by that old Jezebel, and has run away. And so, he said, "Lord, take away my life; for I am no better than my fathers." Just the same as the rest. Would you think it? Yet so it was. Ah, then, friends, do not let us boast. We stand by faith. "Let him that stands take heed lest he fall," not only into despondency, but we should also fall into apostasy but for the preserving power of the blessed God. But what did the Lord do? Met him in the midst of it with bread and with water, the best things in the world, and he lay down to sleep again, till the Lord awoke him; and he went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights. Now see how the Lord appeared for him. Elijah did not expect such an appearance. Do not you see how contrary the Lord answered his prayer? And so, the Lord often answers the prayers of his people in a very contrary sort of way. "Lord," he said, "take away my life." No, Elijah, as though the Lord should say, I do not intend to take away your life. I am going to give you some cake and water, and I will meet you at Horeb, and talk with you there. Indeed, Elijah, I shall not grant your prayer, for I will not take away your life; you shall not die even at all; you shall go to heaven without dying. I will send a fiery chariot with horses of fire, and you shall go to heaven without dying. Well but, Lord, I am not better than my fathers. I know that, you are just what I have made you, as you stand in the great antitypical sacrifice; and therefore, I will not take away your life, and you shall not die at all. Ah, very often I have prayed like that, many times since I have been in the ministry. I have said, Well, really, I do feel so insufficient, what with one perplexity and another, so many finding fault on all hands, one way and the other, I really do wish my time was come, and I was at the end of it all. Now that is my weakness. But the Lord has not

killed me yet, no. I do not suppose I shall go to heaven without dying, do not suppose that. But, bless his dear and holy name! he deals with us as the matter shall require, and not as we deserve or not deserve, for he is pleased to bless, and it cannot be reversed. And here is Jonah; his way was hidden, I was going to say, with a vengeance, from all men. There he was in the bottom of the sea, in the whale's belly, but he got out again. Now, you would think that after this Jonah would be one of the best men in the world. Instead of this, when he could not have his way in Nineveh, he was angry. "Do you well to be angry?" Yes, Lord, "I do well to be angry, even unto death." Angry unto death! What, never going to be good-tempered again, Jonah? You will come around again. The Lord comes in, turns your captivity, and lets you see that you have to come the path that he designed, and that he makes use of these things to further your acquaintance with him, and to glorify his name. Indeed, time would fail to show the many instances of these weaknesses. Jeremiah said, "I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name." Well, I will tell you what, Jeremiah, if you keep to that the people will take your silence for recantation, and they will publish it abroad that you have recanted all your high doctrines, that you have given up the covenant, and given up all those stable doctrines that you have talked about so long. That will be the result. And so, it was. Have you heard about Jeremiah? No. Oh, he has given up those high doctrines, and confessed himself to be in the wrong. Why, who told you that? Oh, report says so. "Report, say they, and we will report it." "But," says Jeremiah, "his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay." Why, we thought he had given it up, and now he is worse than ever. These trials do us good. You may depend upon it the apostle Paul was a better man after the thorn in the flesh even than he was before. So then in all the cases where you read of the Lord's people in the Bible being hedged in, they got out again.

But why is light given? How expressive this inquiry is! It just expresses that self-deception that almost every Christian has been the subject of. I look back now forty-one years ago, when I was brought into the liberty of the gospel, I prophesied, and proved to be a false prophet. Oh, I shall be happy all my days now; the world will have no effect upon me, trouble will have no effect upon me, death will have no effect upon me; I shall be happy all my days, nothing to do but rejoice. And I used to pity those that had much to do with the world, for I had very little to do with it; at the end of the week my anxieties ended, and there was I, my feet like hinds' feet, ranging over the mountains, cared for nothing, no, as happy as possible. By-and-bye all this went off; the world came in, Satan came in, and down I sank. Well, I said, this is strange; I cannot understand this at all. Peter says we are not to think it strange, but I could not help thinking it strange. Oh, how different has my path been from what I wished! Where I have had one joy, I have had I do not know how many sorrows; where I have had one lifting up, I have had I do not know how many castings down. And when we come to understand the matter, we must remember that these are days of tribulation. "In the world you shall have tribulation." Yes, I thought, it is so, but I do not like it when it comes. Well, but if it does come it will go away again. When? When the Lord commands. He has his way in the whirlwind and in the storm. Oh, then, says one, if all these troubles are to go away, and we shall get out of them, we need not trouble ourselves. We cannot help being troubled, and it is right that we should seek the way out; only seek the way out in accordance with God's truth; look to him. Jonah in the whale's belly looked to the Lord; and you know that when the disciples were tossed about on the sea and were afraid, they cried unto the Lord. And when Asa went against a million Ethiopians he cried unto the Lord; and when Jehoshaphat went against the combined forces of the Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites, he

cried unto the Lord, And when thus favored to look to the Lord, if you have this spirit of faith in him, and have this spirit of prayer to him, he will appear. At the same time, we must not expect, of course, to have a path without troubles. As said Hezekiah, "By these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit." For myself, I do not like trouble; but I am obliged publicly to confess that I do not think any minister can be much use to the people without trouble. Oh, it is so different sitting by your fireside and talking about your neighbor's troubles, and what you would do if you were, he, and for those troubles to come into your house, and into your heart, and into your circumstances. Then it is we feel their weight; then it is we groan and sigh. But then the Lord is with his people in all this. "In all their afflictions he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence did save them," does save them, will save them. Can we have, before I just say a word upon the last part, can we have a more striking instance of the Lord's interposition than in the case of Job himself? Here he says his way is hidden. What the Lord is going to do with me I do not know; what will become of me I do not know. Here I am, everything gone; my health gone, my wife turned against me, and that is very disagreeable, very disagreeable, my friends turned against me; all wrong together. My way is hidden, hedged in, I cannot get out. Jeremiah said, "He has hedged me about, that I cannot get out." Ah, say the pious folks, you can if you like. Why don't you come to the Lord? I cannot get out. It is true the Lord can come to me, but I cannot go to him. And Job says, "Oh that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat!" But I cannot. What is to become of me? By-and-bye the Lord steps in, the captivity is turned. Job, do you know how many sheep you have in the field? No. Why, fourteen thousand. Why, I had only seven thousand before. Job, do you know how many camels you have got? Six thousand. Only three thousand before. Job, do you know how many yoke of oxen you have on your premises? Why, ten hundred. I had only five hundred before. Do you know how many she-asses? No. Why, ten hundred. Only five hundred before. Why, I cannot think how this is. So, the Lord turned the captivity of Job, and he lived two lives after his troubles were ended, as you know, "a hundred and forty years;" that is, twice threescore years and ten. Says Satan, "Job, you shall not live out your days." The Lord says, "He shall, and two lives after that." I like to see Satan put down; I glory in it.