

THE SUN RISING UPON A DARK WORLD

Isaiah 9:2: -

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 happiness of those, who by faith, in Messiah, are brought into a state of peace, liberty, and comfort, is greatly enhanced and heightened by the consideration of that previous state of misery in which they once lived, and of the greater misery to which they were justly exposed. They are not only made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, Colossians 1:12,15 but they have delivered from the powers of darkness. Thus while they have communication with God as Father, they contemplate their privilege with a greater pleasure, than they probably could do if they had never known a difference. They remember a time when they were afar off, without hope and without God in the world; and they remember how carelessly they then trifled upon the brink of destruction. In this deplorable and dangerous situation they were found of the Lord, when they sought him not. Isaiah 65:1 He convinced, humbled, and pardoned, them, and brought them near to himself, into a state of adoption and communion by the blood of Jesus. Observe what God tells the Israelites: -

Deuteronomy 9:4-6: -

4 Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the LORD thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the LORD hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD doth drive them out from before thee. 5: Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 6: Understand therefore, that the LORD thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiffnecked people.

Deuteronomy 7:7: -

The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people:

Deuteronomy 4:6-8: -

6 Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. 7: For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we

call upon him for? 8: And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?

We are not called into marvelous light to be bystanders and confine to ourselves but we may be a channel to others getting salvation. The admiration, gratitude, and love, which we feel for this undeserved grace, gives us a more lively sense of the blessings we enjoy and how we would desirous for others to be in the same state.

The people who are spoken of as rejoicing in a great light, were, till this light arose and shone upon them, in darkness.

The land allotted to the tribes of Issachar, Zebulon, and Naphtali, was chiefly included in the province, which, upon a subsequent division of the country, obtained the name of Galilee. The northern part of it, the inheritance of Naphtali, was the boundary or frontier towards Syria, and had been frequently vexed and afflicted, when the sins of Israel brought the armies of their enemies upon them, as frontier countries usually suffer most in times of invasion and war. Particularly this part of land, called Galilee of the Gentiles, was the first, and most immediately exposed to the ravages of Tiglath-Pileser and Sennacherib. And as the people there were likewise more mixed with foreigners, and at the greatest distance from the capital, Jerusalem, on these accounts, Galilee was lightly esteemed by the Jews themselves. They thought no prophet could arise in Galilee. John 7:52 It even prejudiced Nathanael against the first report he received of Jesus as MESSIAH, that he lived, and was generally supposed (by those who were content to be governed by popular rumour, without enquiring attentively for themselves) to have been born in Galilee. He asked, with an appearance of surprise, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" John 1:46 They were accounted a rude, unpolished, provincial people. And therefore, when Peter would have denied any acquaintance with his Lord, he was discovered to be a Galilean Mark 14:70 by his dialect and manner of speech.

This despised and least valued part of the land of Israel, was the principal scene of MESSIAH'S life and ministry. Insomuch, that, as I have observed, he was supposed to have been born there. For God has chosen the weak things to confound the wisdom of this world. A mistake which his enemies industriously supported and made the most of; for those who could persuade themselves that it was so in fact, would thing themselves justified in rejecting his claim. In being one undeniable mark of MESSIAH, given by the prophet Micah, that he was to be born in Bethlehem of Judah. Micah 5:2 He was however, brought up at Nazareth, and lived for a time in Capernaum, towns in Galilee; but both of so little repute, that had they not been connected with history, it is not probable that their names would have been transmitted to posterity.

But by his residence there, Galilee was honoured and ennobled. He himself declared, that on this account, Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (though probably none of them were more than inconsiderable fishing towns) were exalted to heaven. Matthew 11:21-23 Those were highly privileged places which our Lord condescended to visit in person; so likewise are those places where he is pleased to send his gospel. The glorious gospel of the blessed God, when faithfully preached, and thankfully received and improved, renders an obscure village more honourable, and of more real consequence, than the metropolis of a great empire, where this light shineth not. For what are the dark places of the earth Psalms 74:20, however celebrated for numbers and opulence, for the monuments of ambition and arts, but habitations of cruelty, infatuation, and misery!

Though Galilee was favoured with the scripture, and with synagogue worship, and the inhabitants were a people who professed to know the God of Israel, it was a land of darkness at the time of MESSIAH'S appearance. Though they were not idolaters, ignorance prevailed among them. The law and the prophets were read in the synagogues; but we may believe to little good purpose, while they were under the direction of perverse teachers, who substituted the tradition of men for the commands of God. The single circumstance of keeping herds of swine, as the Gaderenes did, seems a proof, that the law of Moses was but little regarded by them. They, as well as the people of Judea, were under the guidance of the Scribes and Pharisees in their religious concerns, who were, if I may use a modern phrase, the clergy of that time; and these, we are assured by him who knew their hearts, were generally corrupted; blind, leaders of the blind. Yet they were held in ignorant admiration, and implicitly submitted to.

From the character of the public ministers of religion, we may, without great danger of mistake, infer the character of the people who are pleased and satisfied with their ministrations. As the disciple cannot, ordinarily, be expected to be superior to his Master; Luke 6:40 the religion of the Scribes may be taken as a standard of that of the Galileans, who were instructed by them. Yet these were the people among whom Messiah chiefly conversed; so that his enemies styled him a Galilean, and a Nazarene, as a mark of reproach and contempt. Many of his apostles, perhaps the most of them, were Galileans likewise. He seeth not as men seeth. 1Samuel 16:7 The most of his immediate followers while upon earth, were such as men despised, on account of their situation, rank, or callings; publicans and sinners, fishermen and Galileans. This was, among other reasons, for the encouragement of the poor, the destitute, the despised, the miserable, and the guilty, in succeeding ages, who should desire to put their trust in his name, and to implore his mercy. To those who received him, he was the light, the true light; he relieved them from the ignorance, wickedness, and distress in which he found them. They, on their parts, bore testimony to him. They saw and acknowledged his glory. They felt his power, and devoted themselves to his service. This much for the literal sense.

But this prophecy is not to be restrained to the first and more immediate season of its accomplishment. The Lord speaks thus of Messiah, in another place. It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation to the ends of the earth. Isa 49:6 And there are many declarations of a like import. He is still the light of the world, Joh 8:12 though no longer visible and conversant with men. By the influence and power of the Spirit, he is still present wherever his gospel is known. This his word of grace and truth he sends where he pleases, and with a discrimination, not unlike that which he observed upon earth. The gospel is preached to the poor. Courts and palaces are seldom favoured with it. While he passes by many great cities, many habitations of the wise and wealthy, he is known in villages and cottages. His condescension and favour to those who are unnoticed by the world, cannot be too highly extolled. That the others are excluded from the same benefits, is more properly to be ascribed to their obstinacy than to his will. They exclude themselves.

He stands at the door and knocks. Revelation 3:20 His word is within their reach, his ministers are within their call. They might easily enjoy every mean and help which the gospel provides for sinners if they pleased, to they do not please. They are either engaged in a round of sensual pleasure, or engrossed by studies and pursuits, which possess their hearts, and fill up their thoughts and time, so that they have neither leisure nor inclination to attend to the things which pertain to their peace. Instead of inviting his gospel to them, they too frequently employ their power and influence to discountenance, and if possible to suppress it. They have their choice. The great will not receive his message; it is therefore sent to the poor, and to the wretched, and they will hear it. Yet as he visited Jerusalem in person and taught there, so all the cities of the world are likewise favoured with the light of his gospel. But, alas, How few believe the report? They who do, experience the change described in the text. Their darkness is changed into marvelous light.

Mankind, till enlightened by the word and spirit of grace, are truly in a state of darkness. Thick darkness is a veil which conceals from us, not only distant, but the nearest objects. A man in the dark cannot perceive either friend or enemy; he may be in great danger, yet think himself in safety; or, if he thinks himself in danger, be unable to take any step for his preservation, from a want of light. Thus, though God be our maker and preserver, though in him we live, move, and have our being, though we are surrounded with his presence, and proofs of his wisdom and goodness are before us wherever we turn our eyes, yet we live without him in the world. Equally ignorant we are of ourselves, of the proper happiness of our nature, or how it is to be attained. We know neither the cause, nor the cure, nor the consequences of our proneness to cleave to the dust, and of placing our affection on inadequate and unsatisfying objects.

And if we suppose a person awakened to a conviction of the evil of sin, and to understand that nothing less than the favour of God can make a rational and

immortal creature happy, still without the gospel, he would be in darkness and shadow of death. His case may be compared to that of a person shipwrecked upon some desert, inhospitable coast, suffering great horrors and anxiety, from his exposedness to perish by hunger, by enemies or wild beasts—who, if he saw, at now very great distance, an island, and was, by some means, informed and assured that island was the seat of safety, plenty, and pleasure; and that if he was once there, his dangers would all cease, and his utmost wishes be satisfied; still if there were neither bridge, nor boat, nor any means by which he might arrive thither, to know that happiness was so near him, yet inaccessible to him, would but aggravate his misery, and make his despair more emphatically pungent. Miserable, indeed, must we be, if we clearly perceived that only he, whose creatures we are, can make us happy; and that as sinners we have forfeited his favour, and are utterly incapable of regaining it, if we were left under these views without any hope of relief. Such must have been our situation sooner or later, if God, who is rich in mercy, had not himself provided the means of reconciliation. For though a hope of pardon is easily taken up by those who are ignorant of the holiness of God and the malignity of sin, yet nothing but a declaration from himself, that there is forgiveness with him, can give peace to a truly awakened conscience. But Jesus dispels this darkness, and brings life and immortality to by the gospel. For,

- a) *The office and agency of the Holy Spirit, so absolutely necessary to make us duly sensible, either of our danger, or of the possibility of escaping it, is entirely the effect of his mediation. The soul of man, originally formed to be the temple of the living God, when defiled by sin, was justly forsaken by its great inhabitant: and since the fall, answers the prophetic description given of Babylon. It is become the habitation of devils, the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. Revelation 18:2 If we ask, as with good reason we may, How can the wise and holy God, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and with whom evil cannot dwell, return to his sanctuary thus polluted and profaned? an answer is afforded in that gracious promise, I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean, from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I clean you: and I will take away the stony heart, and I will give you a heart of flesh, and (in order to this) I will put my Spirit within you. Ezekiel 36:25-26 But the source of this mercy, is his sovereign love and purpose, to give the seed of the woman, his only Son, to be the mediator for sinners. By his atonement to be manifested in due time, but which had a virtual influence from the beginning, the Holy Spirit returned to dwell with men.***
- b) *His obedience unto death, when revealed by the Holy Spirit to the enlightened conscience, affords a clear and satisfactory***

discovery of reconciliation with God: it shews that on his part, every hindrance to the free exercise of mercy is thereby removed, the honour of his law vindicated, and the demands of his justice answered. On our parts, by opening a door of hope, it removes that enmity and obduracy of heart, which are nourished by a consciousness of guilt, and a secret foreboding of deserved punishment. But when the dignity of the Redeemer's person, the causes, nature, and design of his sufferings are understood, emotions of admiration, love, and gratitude, till then unknown, are felt, and obstinate sinners are made a willing people in this day of divine power.

- c) The doctrine of the cross pours a light upon every subject and circumstance in which we are concerned. It enlarges the mind, and forms the judgment and taste, agreeable to the standard of truth, and the real nature of things. It rectifies those prejudices and prepossessions which dispose us to mistake good for evil, and evil for good, Isaiah 5:20 to pursue trifles with earnestness, and to trifle with things of the greatest importance. In Jesus Christ crucified, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are, at once, both hidden and exhibited. This object, the holy angels, whose knowledge of the wonders in creation without doubt, greatly surpasses our conceptions, incessantly contemplate with delight, as affording the brightest displays of the manifold wisdom of God. Ephesian 3:10 It is especially the fountain of wisdom to sinners. They look unto him and are enlightened. The slight and partial thoughts they once entertained of the great God, the mistaken judgment they formed of themselves, of their state and their conduct, are corrected by their knowledge of the cross; from thence they derive a solid hope, a humble spirit, just views of their duty and obligations, and motives and prospects which animate them in a course of cheerful, preserving obedience to the will of God.**
- d) In this way, God, as revealed in Christ, is apprehended and chosen, as the chief and proper good of the soul. Thus the poor are enriched with the pearl of great price, and the weary obtain rest. The mind no longer burdened with anxiety, nor mortified with a succession of disappointments, which attended the vain pursuits of happiness in earthly things, possesses present peace, and rejoices in the expectation of future glory. It is released from the slavery of hewing our broken cisterns, and introduced to the fountain of living waters. Or, to close with the beautiful image in my text, The people who once walked in darkness and the region of the shadow of death, are translated into the kingdom of life, and salvation. Col 1:13**

How greatly are they to be pitied who reject the light of the gospel! It is true, they cannot see it. Do not reason against your own life, but repent and believe the gospel. The light shines around you, whether you perceive it or not; and it has an efficacy to open the eyes of the blind. Where the gospel is preached the Lord is present. If you call upon him he will hear, and you shall receive your sight. If the grace and the glory of the Saviour have hitherto made no impression upon your heart, you are spiritually blind, Could you be sensible of your disorder, the remedy is at hand. If not at last you are willing to seek him, he will be of you. But if you deliberately prefer darkness, your state is awfully dangerous; and if you persist in your obstinacy, your ruin is unavoidable. God is gracious and long suffering, but he will not be mocked. Galatians 6:7 Humble yourself at once and implore his mercy, or else prepare to meet him in judgment. But be assured he will not meet you as a man. You must either bend or break. The Lord forbid that he should say to any of you, in the great day of his appearance, Depart from me ye cursed, into everlasting fire! For those whom the light has come he says: -

Matthew 5:14-16: -

14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. 15: Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. 16: Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Isaiah 60:1-11: -

1 Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. 2: For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. 3: And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. 4: Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. 5: Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee. 6: The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD. 7: All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee: they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory. 8: Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows? 9: Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the LORD thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because he hath glorified thee. 10: And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee. 11: Therefore

thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought.

Blessings