

LIFE, LOVE and LIGHT

The Gospel of John and First Epistle of John

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CHAPTER THREE

THE GOSPEL OF LIGHT

"I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12)

In our first study we saw that the Gospel of John is the Gospel of Life - remarkably so, as though that were its one message and aim. In our second study we saw it as the Gospel of Love - marvelously so, as though Love were its one throbbing theme. And now we are to see that it is equally the Gospel of Light. Twenty-five times the word occurs, while the thought is still more dominant. We cannot have Life and Love without Light, any more than we can have two of the Trinity without the third.

The dictionary defines light as "*The essential condition of vision; the opposite of darkness.*" (It is, then, the revealer of that which we otherwise could not see; it is the enemy of darkness, which obscures and conceals.) Also, "*An emanation from a light-giving body.*" (Light, then, requires a source.) Also, "*The sensation aroused by the stimulation of the visual centers.*" (Light seeks to secure a response, its own purposed effect, in us.) Finally, "*That form of energy which, by its action upon the organs of vision, enables them to perform their function of sight.*" (Light alone enables us to see and know).

These statements make it evident that light is essential to spiritual life, that it must have its source outside of us and find its response within us.

I The Light of Creation

The opening words of John's Gospel take us back to the eternal Son of GOD, back yonder in a dateless "**beginning**" (John 1:1, 2). He was the Creator - "**all things were made by Him**" (vs. 3). Not only so, but "**in Him was life**" (vs. 4a), and that Life, imparted and given its highest expression, became "**the light of men**" (vs.4b).

Creation ends there. Man is its intended culmination and climax. That "Life," in His likeness, places us at the top, with a "light" that differentiates us from all other created existence. Life made man to share the nature of GOD; Light enabled him to share His knowledge and wisdom. Thus lightened, man's eyes saw, and ever see, what the animal's eyes have never seen nor ever will see. Man is akin to GOD.

But the next verse (vs. 5) introduces the element of "darkness" - a moral state that can not "comprehend" the light. Here, then, is the great moral and spiritual struggle between good and evil, GOD and the Devil, life and death, light and darkness, as anticipated and portrayed in the majestic words - of which these in John are the counterpart - with which the Genesis account opens the Bible: **"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light; and there was light"** (Genesis 1:1-3).

II The Light of CHRIST's Coming

As GOD spake in the beginning, dispelling darkness with light; so in the fullness of time GOD spake with His appointed "Word" - the living Word, His very Self, incarnate, sent among us as **"bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh,"** to penetrate our spiritual darkness and bring back to us the light with which He had originally blessed us. Yea, the first light of creation with the added light of re-creation.

This is the story of John 1:6-14. Whatever other lights GOD sent us - all the prophets and now John, the forerunner and immediate witness to the Light - here is the **"true Light which lighteth every man"** (vs. 9). Yet man's hopeless, helpless state in darkness is shown by the fact that **"He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not"** (vs. 10).

How much man needed CHRIST!

Note the next verse:

"He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (vs. 11). They were in such blinding moral darkness that they did not know the Light when it came. They would not have Him. And men today are in that same condition, unaltered. Their rejection of GOD's Light is the strongest proof we have of man's moral obliquity, darkness and death. Every day that man lives in continued refusal of the Light he is proving GOD's portrait of him, in a ruined estate, all too true.

But when men do receive Him - what? They get back the **"light of life."** They have Him, and He is the **"Light of Life."**

Please read what happens as though for the first time: **"But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God"** (vv. 12, 13).

Now we see! See what we had not the power of perception to see before! We see, through the Incarnate Son, the glory of GOD. **"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth"** (vs. 14).

III The Light of Conviction

With chapter 3 we find JESUS stressing the need of the New Birth.

We hear Him say to Nicodemus:

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God . . . Ye must be born again" (vv. 3, 7). And this necessity is enforced by the declaration that for this purpose GOD in His love gave His Son and sent Him into the world, **"that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life"** (vs. 16).

Men, however, do not acknowledge their need of a New Birth; therefore they do not feel their need of CHRIST. So, while **"God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world,"** but rather that it might be saved (vs. 17), the practical result is condemnation, self-induced by their attitude of rejection. The HOLY SPIRIT has taken great pains to make this doubly plain. Let us note carefully as we read:

"He that believeth on Him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God" (vv. 18-21).

The paramount need of today is that this very Light of Conviction break in upon men's souls. The fact that they need CHRIST, plus the further fact that they refuse to take Him as Saviour, is prima facie evidence that they stand convicted and condemned.

IV The Light of Conversion

It is this light of which JESUS speaks in John 8:12, **"I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."**

The light of creation was a bestowment of His life - **"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men"** (John 1:4).

The light of the new creation - redemption - is a new bestowment of His life. It is **"the light of life"**; life from the dead, from a state of spiritual darkness and inability to know spiritual things.

This teaching of chapter 8 is given vivid illustration in chapter 9, when JESUS opens the eyes of the man "**born blind**." His first birth left him in darkness. JESUS brought to his eyes and to his soul the light of a new birth.

Today we have the spectacle of men who are spiritually blind discussing and judging spiritual things. College professors, scientists, once-born men, not acknowledging that they, equally with other men, were "**born blind**," are breaking into the realm of the spiritual and talking about things as much beyond them in their natural state as politics and finances are beyond a dog.

The dog cannot know these things because they are above and beyond his sphere of perception. Just so are spiritual things to men until they receive their "second sight" - the light of life. (Read Paul's reasoning in point - I Corinthians 2:11-16).

The noise that these men are making in their blindness reminds us very much of an incident related to us by an officer of our Church. It was a personal experience of his boyhood days.

Of it he says:

"Bathing one morning at a seaside resort at the entrance to Belfast Lough, known as Donaghadee, a group of us were about to dive off the harbour when we noticed a bank of fog about 200 yards long moving slowly past the harbour and going up the Lough in the direction of Belfast. As I remember it today, it would have reminded one of the shape of a giant dirigible. The sky was clear all around. While we were watching it, the Liverpool cross-channel steamer hove in sight on its way up to Belfast. As soon as it entered the fog it began blowing the foghorn and slowing down to the same rate of speed that the bank of fog was going. It was a remarkable sight. We watched for fully half an hour and the steamer failed to come out of the fog in all that time. However, had the steamer been going at a greater speed than the fog she would have passed through it in less than five minutes."

These men, surrounding themselves with the mists and fog of doubt and unbelief, often willful in its nature, are not only crying loudly with their foghorns that they cannot see, but are brazenly denying to others the right to affirm the reality of that which we (once in their state but now declaring with the born-blind man, "**Whereas I was blind, now I see**", know by our recovery of spiritual sight to be a glorious reality.

When we were resident in Alaska we had a striking illustration of the fact that what men need is not new truth or evidence so much as the ability to see the truth. Their difficulty lies with themselves. They need an ability to see that comes only with conversion, the result of an "inner light," wrought by the regeneration of GOD's HOLY SPIRIT.

The town of Skagway is surrounded by mountains.

One is known as Face Mountain because it is surmounted by the face of a man. The features are in such clear, bold relief against the sky-line that tourists note it at once without the slightest difficulty. One beautiful day we met a long-time resident and remarked on how clearly the face, blanketed with snow, stood out that afternoon. He replied, "In all these years I have never been able to see the face they talk about."

We said, "What! You can't see the face? Why man, look with me." And with our finger we traced the forehead, nose, lips, chin, until he cried, "Why yes, now I see it; now I see."

It had been there these thousands of years; all he needed was the ability to see it. That is all you need, my friend, to see GOD in the face of JESUS CHRIST. Once seeing, you will know.

V

The Light of Communion

Following conversion, in the possession of His life and nature we are capable of communion with Him as was not before possible. Into this communion of life JESUS leads us in the intimate teachings of John 15: "**I am the vine, ye are the branches . . . Abide in Me, and I in you.**"

It is a life lighted by His own immediate presence.

A life in which He bestows His own Spirit upon us, promising that "**He, the Spirit of truth, will guide us into all truth**" (John 16:13).

Thus He precludes the possibility of His follower coming under the darkening shadow of uncertainty, if only he will live in this provision of union and communion: "**He . . . will guide you.**" And as though this were not enough, lest we think ourselves at any time left to our own resources, this life provides for direct access to Him through prayer. And it is prayer to Him at the right hand of the Father, the place of "**all power.**" "**Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full**" (vs. 24).

VI

The Light of Consecration

The Light wrought in us, by communion with CHRIST, now becomes the Light shining out from us, by consecration to CHRIST. It is the step by which sanctification merges into Service.

This complementary truth is found in John 15.

Often we fail to recognize that the Vine and Branch teaching harks back to the imagery of the candlestick in the Tabernacle. The candlestick was designed with "branches" proceeding from the central stem or "vine," each branch carrying the representation of "fruit" upon it. The oil, the HOLY SPIRIT, flowing through the branch, produced the fruit in the form of light. Thus it is we are to abide in Him, yield to Him, draw upon Him, that He may bear His own fruit, that is, show forth His own light, through us.

Brought to the service side of the truth we are now studying, how forcefully we are reminded that light is not for ourselves but for others. It lightens us only that through us it may lighten those about us. Busy bringing light to others, JESUS said, "**As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world**" (John 9:5).

These words, "**as long as,**" anticipate the creating of new light centers, when, having gone hence

and having planted His Spirit in our hearts, He could say of us, His candlesticks, "**Ye are the light of the world.**"

Tracing this teaching on into the Epistles, where the appeal is based upon the fact of His abiding, candlestick relationship, believers find themselves pictured as being "**in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life**" (Philippians 2:15b, 16a).

Every believer should adopt as his life-motto the words, so beautifully suggestive, inscribed upon the famous Eddystone Lighthouse, on the coast of England: "To give light and to save life."

Our Lord's call to consecration, enforced by conditions of darkness about us, makes this our imperative duty.

VII The Light of CHRIST's Coming Again

It is most graciously significant that the Gospel narrative of our Lord's days in the flesh is not suffered to close without causing to shine upon the pathway of His followers the light of the promise that He will come again. In that dark hour when the Cross was casting its shadow across the heart of CHRIST and His chosen company, begetting fears and forebodings - in that hour of gathering gloom JESUS reassured them with the prospect of a glory He was going before to get ready, only that He might return and receive them into it, a promise and prospect that was to become the pole-star of the Church's hope through the years, often long and weary, of the Saviour's absence.

Then, as always since, those wondrous words dispelled the shadows from their hearts. "**Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also**" (John 14:1-3).

And now the Gospel concludes with this light focused upon the heart and pathway of one individual disciple. Peter, having received the revelation of his prospective martyrdom, asked the Lord as to John's future. The reply burned itself into John's consciousness: "**If I will that he tarry till I come**" (read John 21:22,23). Through intervening years the now venerable Apostle (90 A. D.) had walked in that light, buoyed by the realization that the Lord Himself had intimated the possibility of His return within his very life-time.

And when exile for CHRIST's sake befell him, there on Patmos he saw His coming in glorious vision and the comforting reality of it broke as a sunburst of glory in his soul! Just so for every child of GOD today; however dark the outlook of earthly circumstance, it is his privilege to walk facing the fadeless light of the Coming One and of the New Creation about to be wherein dwelleth righteousness and peace.

- How does our heart respond to our Lord's promise?
- Are we living daily in its pulse-quickening prospect?

- Does its light glorify the day-by-day round of drudgery?

Hoeing Cotton

There's a King and Captain high
Who is coming by and by,
And He'll find me hoeing cotton when
He comes!

You can hear His legions charging,
In the regions of the sky,
And He'll find me hoeing cotton
when He comes!

When He comes! When He comes!
All the dead shall rise in answer to
His drums;
And the fires of His encampment star
The firmament on high,
And the heavens shall roll asunder when He comes!

There's the Man they thrust aside,
Who was tortured till He died,
And He'll find me hoeing cotton when
He comes!
He was hated and rejected,
He was scorned and crucified,
And He'll find me hoeing cotton
when He comes!

When He comes! When He comes!
He'll be crowned by saints and angels
when He comes;
They'll be shouting out "Hosannah!"
To the Man that men denied,
And I'll kneel among my cotton when He comes!

Shadwell, from a Negro Song

~ end of chapter 3 ~

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