

Walking in darkness

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[0 : 00] I would like you to turn with me now to that portion of scripture that we have read already. And Isaiah chapter 50 and the last two verses of the chapter.

Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obey the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light?

Let him trust in the name of the Lord and stay upon his God. Behold all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks.

Walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow.

Now I want to state very plainly and directly who I have in mind particularly in regard to the message of this evening.

[1 : 29] And I have in mind particularly those of you present who did not sit with us today at the Lord's table.

And I want to bring out what I consider to be the religious position, the religious state of some of you whose condition I find stated in chapter, in verse 10.

And I want to look briefly at others whose religious state and condition is of a different nature from that.

I think that it is not helpful to you nor to the gospel proclamation when everyone who doesn't, as it were, sit at the Lord's table are treated en masse as if the religious state was similar in all respects.

I believe that just as we have a very clear division between two groups of people in the portion of scripture that I have here so do I believe that in regard to those of you and that is most of you who are present here this evening and I refer especially to those who did not sit at the Lord's table that I would suggest that by far the larger part of you belong to those to whom we can apply the words of verse 10 and I would think that it is only the minority that are found included amongst those who are described in verse 11.

[4 : 16] Now I know and I just mentioned this I know that the general interpretation or the general application I should say that is given of verse 10 is somewhat different from that that the scripture this scripture is applied principally to those who are professed believers and who may be passing through periods of spiritual difficulty but I do not argue that that may not be one way of applying it I believe that it is but I also from experiences that I've had in connection with this particular scripture along the lines that I'm treating it this evening

I believe it is applicable to others as well I want you to remember that I am in I believe in accordance with the scripture I am not thinking of you all as one that is those of you who are not at the Lord's table or who are not giving proof of your commitment to the Lord I want you to know that I do not regard you as one undifferentiated mess and I believe that I have the mind of the scriptures in taking this approach now there is a state of affairs that lies behind this address of the prophet in verses 10 and 11

I like the American way of praising that that lies back it may not be permissible or acceptable here but that is a way a good way of describing it a state of affairs that lies back of this now what was the state of affairs well I think that the chapter has in view the departure of the children of Israel into the Babylon bondage and whether that be exactly the case or whether it be just the impoverished state of things with them when the prophet wrote this that they had they were experiencing very very difficult times they were going through very trying periods and they were interpreting from a religious point of view these sad events in their experience and perhaps the most fearful complaint that they were making was that

God had actually rejected them and that they were as those who were sold the prophet Amos tells us of our state of affairs in Israel in his own time when the poor were sold for a pair of shoes and this is what Israel were saying God has just sold us as if we were utterly worthless but that he had rejected them and sold them as if they were utterly worthless now the Lord was responding to that and he was saying to them produce the bill of your mother's divorcement produce the evidence that you have that I have

I might put it covenantally rejected you produce it and the challenge was sent forth because it could not be produced it could not be produced they could not prove that God had rejected them even whatever circumstances they were in it did not validate their claim that they had been rejected of God nor did their circumstances validate the claim that they had been sold by God as something that he no longer considered as his own property and considered as of no value they couldn't produce the evidence or the attestation to show that their claims were valid at all they were not they were totally invalid and that is really the state of affairs that is as it were back or behind this address of the prophet now

[10:19] I will shortly apply that to you they were in a very very sad situation and to a certain extent you may feel this evening that from a religious point of view and on account of the state of affairs that pertains by and large amongst us at this present time but you particularly you who cannot count yourselves amongst the redeemed of the Lord may feel and indeed may be persuaded in your hearts that God has rejected you that he sees no value or worth in you well just as surely as God was saying to these people you have no proof you have no confirmatory evidence of that fact he is saying that to you he is saying that to you but although that complaint was

I believe quite prevalent amongst them yet the fact of the matter is that there were some of them despite the sad circumstances that they were in and the difficulties that they were up against religiously and in other ways there were some of them that yet were distinguished by certain religious characteristics that set them apart from those who had utterly rebelled against God and I believe that the vast majority of you this evening before me bear exactly the same religious characteristics tonight that those people have old did he speaks first of the fear of the Lord now you have heard often enough that this is not being in a state of terror at the thought of God that it is nothing of that kind of thing at all oh we must always remember as we are reminded in the scriptures that there is a terror that belongs to the

Lord and that will be manifested yet as it has never been when we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ as the apostle said being persuaded or being mindful of the terror of the Lord we persuade people we will come to that in a minute they feared the Lord first of all I think that we have to understand from that that they observed the duties of worship and of service to God in a reasonably acceptable way often in scripture the fear of God is put for the whole of piety we could say or for religion in its wholeness but it often has the meaning or the connotation that people are attentive to their religious duties and that they are attentive to their religious duties and to walking circumspectly that they are that on account of the fact that they have a reverence for God in their hearts now I believe that most of you present here this evening are in that state of religious in that religious state in that right respect in that relationship with God you have not given up faithful attendance upon religious duties to perform them conscientiously lies very close to your heart and perhaps and I say this without inferring any offense to those of us who are quite public in our profession of faith in the

Lord that sometimes such is your diligence in attending upon religious duties and walking circumspectly that there are times that you are so careful in these things as to put us to shame and that must not be passed over or dismissed as something without significance the other characteristic that is mentioned here is that they obeyed the voice of his servant or that they hearkened and obeyed to the voice of his servant now many of you here whom I am addressing this evening have an ear for the gospel you you don't as it were shut your ear against the gospel that is preached here from sabbath to sabbath

I know that many of you carry home with you much of the teaching and the preaching and that you are diligent in the sense in which you seek to advance your acquaintance with the truth as it is set forth from the scriptures in the pulpit here I know that that is the case and to that extent you also bear upon in your life you also bear upon this myth of seeking to familiarize yourself to as it were acquaint yourself as thoroughly as you possibly can with the truths of the gospel and you do that because you have an appreciation for them you have a recognition and a realization in your heart that this is the word of

[18 : 22] God that is set forth now I want to add another factor in connection with this I want to bring out the fact that in order to get my message home if possible as close as I can that not only in terms of your character and living do you bear these remarks but I want to remind you of your special relationship to God as his covenant people I have no doubt whatsoever in my mind that one of the reasons for our religious declension and especially for the state in which we are not prepared to make any commitment in a meaningful way to the gospel and to the

Lord that a large part of it is due to the fact that under a lack of differentiation according to the scriptures where all those who do not as it were come to the Lord's table are treated as one mass of worldly people if the covenant relationship if it was given proper attention then we would see that this is consonant with what we got here and yet it is clear that not all is well for all that not all is well for all the fact that you fear the

Lord and obey the voice of his servant in the saints in which I been speaking of it you walk in darkness and have no light now I think that we can say that in regard in regard to the people that this darkness comprehended at least the effect of their circumstances upon them and to a certain extent in respect of you apart altogether from your own personal heart problems we have to take into consideration that much of the religious situation that we're in may be and probably is very confusing and indeed perhaps even almost totally discouraging that is one aspect of the darkness in other words from the point of view of the objective matters in the gospel or in our practice of religion there is not that element of certainty of definiteness of absolute clarity upon the matter that there formerly was things are obscured in a way that they did not used to be obscured by the things that are happening and you feel with the regard that you have for the things of

God in your heart and your desire to be acquainted with the truth and to be attentive to the voice of the Lord if only if only things were more clear if only things were more definite things would be better but I think that we must go beyond that so far as the darkness is concerned and perhaps the point that I wish to emphasize particularly here is that you are without any persuasion in your heart that you have a clear understanding of the way of salvation you are without persuasion in your heart that you have any assurance in regard to your interest in Christ you lack these things and probably the case for all the fact that you have this measure of the fear of God in your heart on this regard to the word yet you don't know where you stand you are confused and when it says that there is no light the situation may very well be that nobody is able to help you that you are not finding help coming in the way that you need it in giving you the guidance that you need in giving you the encouragement that you need in giving you the spiritual support that you need and indeed

I know when I say this when I unhesitatingly I say this unhesitatingly that the message of the church can become very negative and respect of those who are in such a condition as this walking in darkness and having no light now I want to turn to the counsel that is given let him trust in the name of the Lord and stay upon his God what is he talking about here well he's talking about that nature of faith by which we enter into the enjoyment of the benefits of God's grace by which we enter into personal possession of the salvation that we have in

[26 : 17] Christ but have you not said have you not credit us with a degree of faith with a sincere interest in religion with carefulness and circumspection in regard to the manner in which we live yes I have and I take nothing back but that doesn't mean to say that you're not spiritually deficient because you are but I want to first of all put this point foremost that the fact that you are spiritually deficient doesn't mean that God as it were stands apart without interest in your situation or without a care or concern for it the great thing the thrilling thing for me when I looked at this scripture in this way was how it reflected the compassion and care of God for those who are in your condition remember how falsely they concluded he has divorced us he's rejected us we're just like a woman that has been thrown away or like children that have been sold for trivial things and God is saying that is not so and he's not saying

I am unconcerned and uncaring about your condition arising from your spiritual deficiencies far from it I think it's fearfully cruel when people when a kind of blank unexplained statement something like this and I've heard it often you're unconverted where you have no part in these things you're outside of all this that's not the way that scripture looks at it it doesn't mean that because of these spiritual deficiencies and I will come to it in a minute that God is not concerned about the fact that you're coming short of what he would bestow upon you if you would that is what he's saying let him trust in the name of the

Lord and stay upon his God now I'm not going to enter into a kind of word by word explanation of that statement I mulled over this and I thought what kind of application can this have to people in the condition that I've been describing to you who are sitting here in front of me but I think that what it means is this or at least this is one in which it can apply for all the fact that you have a deep regard for the things of God and that you are conscientious in the practice of your religious duties and that you revere and respect the things of God for all that the fact of the matter is you have not placed that saving trust in Christ by which you would be justified by which you would be brought through the grace of adoption into the family of God and through which ultimately you would be sanctified and prepared for the enjoyment of the things of heaven much used to be spoken in times gone by particularly in Puritan times much discussion what was the nature of the act of faith through which the sinner is justified in other words they recognize that in terms of faith as it is as it appropriate salvation as it brings the person into the enjoyment of the salvation that is in Christ that faith that faith of a special nature may put it like that or faith from a particular aspect was required for that now that raises the question what exactly is involved in it for you and indeed for me too to have this trust in the name of the

Lord and to stay upon his God but I think that first and foremost that it means this that there would be total unreserved approval of heart on your part in regard to God's way of salvation that is the nature of faith as it is saving in its basic in its basic definition that is it as it is saving a hearty or a whole hearted approval of God's way of salvation and if I may add utter reliance upon

God's way and reliance upon it because it is God's way regardless of what difficulties or problems we may face and tonight I urge you to give some time to spiritual or to religious self assessment and to really examine yourselves whether for all the fact that you're respectful attentive and careful in the things of religion in your life I want you to honestly ask yourself the question have I wholeheartedly approved of what God has provided in Christ for salvation and do I trust myself to it because and primarily because it is

[34 : 22] God's provision it is God's provision and that is what the Lord does and as far as I see this doesn't come just as it were as a naked command I so often hear and hear properly people saying oh yes ministers were saying believe believe believe it doesn't come just as a naked command like that it comes as a word of advice and encouragement of words that are meant to encourage you in your sense of forsakenness and rejection encourage you not to believe your own inward thoughts or your understanding of your circumstances in regard to your thoughts don't believe them reject them remember that

God cares and that God wills salvation for you if you will have it or you say no you're becoming a total Arminian well what is God mean when he says I have no pleasure at all in the death of the wicked my pleasure is that the wicked turn from his way in repentance so that he may live as I live said the Lord this is the case it is the voice of unbelief and though it may feel that it has the claim as it were of a watertight logic behind it

I say it is still the voice of unbelief when we question the will of God that we should be saved as that is revealed to us in his word this is what I would urge you to tonight it's wonderful and I say this it's wonderful to see you with the fear of God the measure of the fear of God that you have in your lives it's wonderful to see you with the commitment and interest in the gospel that you show it's sad that you are in a state of darkness and confusion and lacking that necessary lie by which you would know clearly but even in that state of confusion even in that state of relative ignorance of whatever it may be let me urge you to go directly to

Christ and to embrace him as God's provision for your salvation and to do it in the knowledge that the Lord God will have it so I cannot do justice by what I say to the persuasion that I have in my heart of God's care for you tonight God's care for you tonight and even if it is the case that you feel that you sometimes get reactions and responses from his people and even from you in the pulpit remember that is not how

God is God cares and I challenge you tonight would you go on as it were blaming God for the fact that as it were you haven't realized the aims which you have in being religious respectful to the truth no no no just as he said to them where is the bill of your mother's divorce been produced as he said we must remember this that it is our transgressions that has been the result of that and that continues to be the cause of that I should say now I want to look at the other part very very briefly just a word I have spoken up of

[39 : 45] God's compassion about God's care and I have not done justice to it but don't let you or I forget that there is also severity with God let us not forget that the fact of the matter is if we just hold on to one strand of thought here that is the thought of his compassion and of his care and of his mercy and fail to remember that also the God with whom we have to do is a consuming fire our religious persuasion of the goodness and mercy of God will deteriorate into sheer sentimentalism but if we recognize that our God is holy and that he is just and that even in the execution of judgment that there is the most awesome severity with him if we hold that it will not in any way whatsoever take away from our persuasion of his care and of his mercy but it will enhance it now we know and he marks out very clearly those who come under his severity in that respect described in a very sort of almost an enigmatic figure was a kindle of hide and compass yourselves about with sparrows now

I'm not quite certain exactly as to what that figure says to us about these people I don't think that I'm away from the mark when I say that these people are a contrast to the others those who retained that measure of the fear of God in their hearts and lives and those who are diligent in their attendance upon the cross there are those who as it were have advanced to the point in which they will establish a religious relationship to God of their own making they think that they can set apart the pattern of religion and holy things that God has given they will themselves produce something of that well of course

I have to say that every single form of human religion in the world is precisely of this snake and every form of religion in the world except the one is of human production the only one religion in the world that is not human produced is the religion which is now known as Christianity or you may not have gone to the extent of embracing alien religions but at a personal level are you trying to establish a form of religious relationship between yourself and God other than the one that God has set before us in the gospel through Christ and in

Christ well that is kindling a fire of your own kindling a fire of your own and let us see the contrast and let us mark it there are those who retaining as it were their hot allegiance to the gospel of the grace of God in Christ the contrast with them and those who are determined that by their own wisdom and their own religious energy that they can themselves set up or produce a form of personal religion that will be adequate for their needs it is not so it is not so you may go about in the light of the sparks of that fire you may walk in that they'll soon be extinguished it takes very very little in the way of adversity and providence to extinguish the false hopes that are built upon a spurious religion but that is not the end of it

I should have mentioned in regard to the first that there is understood that if we trust in the Lord if we make God and Christ our trust for our salvation that without any question there will ultimately be deliverance from all our evils and that we will be favored with blessings unimaginably precious and bountiful ours will be the reward that God gives in the riches of his mercy and grace to those who put their trust in Christ but on the other hand this is the thing the contrast in the end between those who go their own way in religion and will not submit to the truth of God as it is in Christ who will not rely upon him and cast themselves upon him all such will have it at the hand of

[46 : 49] God that they will lie down in sorrow lie down in sorrow the severity of the divine judgment let us not put that away from our hearts lie down in sorrow and we know in the light of the fullness of new testament revelation the awfulness of that sorrow the awfulness of that sorrow to go away to be sent away into the place of torment you know I was thinking in connection with this you have much of the fear of God in your heart and then you show it forth in your life and you have a great deal of delight in the gospel and first of all if we fail to make

Christ our trust you know whose company you will be in first of all you will have your portion with the hypocrite that itself is surely something to really be anxious over just imagine you who have had so much respect for religion who are in such a position of covenant relationship with God with its privileges the you who have so joyfully listened to the message of salvation if in the end because of your failure to put your trust in Christ you will be in the company of the hypocrites but that's not the end of it where are the hypocrites in the place that has been prepared for the devil and his angels that is the thought and that is that it will be so with in respect of you oh for the sake of entering into the enjoyment of the bliss of everlasting blessedness and the necessity of fleeing from such a destiny as to lie down in sorrow would you not heed the encouraging wives of God pleading with you trust in the name of the

Lord stay upon your God rely wholly and totally on Jesus Christ and all the sufficiency of grace that there is in him for your salvation may God bless to us these thoughts of his word let's pray our eternal and ever blessed God as we close our services of public worship for this day we thank thee for thy goodness to us in that we have been privileged to enjoy another communion Sabbath another Lord's Day with its gospel privileges our father in heaven we pray thee to be merciful to those of our beloved people who have so much regard for thee and for the gospel to whom these things are truly precious and yet of whom it is true that they walk in darkness and have no light oh

Lord that it may be so with them as David was so confident of the Lord will light my candle so that it shall shine full bright the Lord my God shall also make my darkness to be light grant that it may be so our father in heaven we pray and we ask it in Jesus name amen earth in hymn he he he he he he