

Light and Darkness

Our New Testament reading for today (John chapter 12) brings our attention to one of the themes of this Gospel Record: that of Light and Darkness. So the record describes the words of the Master:

"I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should *not abide in darkness*" (Jno. 12:46).

The theme commences with the first Chapter of John thus:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was ***the light of men***. And ***the light shineth in darkness***; and the darkness comprehended it not" (Jno. 1:1-5).

Although these words are quite plainly to do with the Beginning of the New Creation, there is a very clear allusion to the means by which the Genesis Creation was brought about. In the Genesis record, we have the same expression "in the beginning", together with "the Word" being spoken, and the introduction of "light" as the first aspect of Creation:

"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. And God saw the light that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness" (Gen. 1:1-4).

Notice the highlighted expressions: here is "the beginning", which was brought about by the first spoken Words in the Bible (i.e. "God Said ..."), and the consequence of that Word was the introduction of "light". These elements come together once again in the formation of a New Creation in Christ Jesus. In a similar way as John chapter 1, the Apostle Paul also alludes back to the Genesis Creation as a template for the New:

"God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the ***light of the knowledge*** of the glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

And again, verse 4 of the same chapter speaks of "***the light*** of the glorious ***Gospel*** of Christ". So we have the principle that just as God spoke the Words which formed Light "in the beginning" - which light was declared to be "good" - even so light was caused to shine by the preaching of the Good Word (Gospel = "Good News"). That light enters into the darkest recesses of our hearts, illuminating us as to the ways of the Most High God, and brings about life, and the formation of a New Creation.

BEHOLDING THE FACE OF GLORY

The Light of the New Creation is seen "in the face of Jesus Christ". There is an allusion here to the experiences of Moses and the Children of Israel, as recounted in the Exodus record. Exodus chapter 33 narrates the request of Moses to Yahweh: "shew my ***thy Glory***". The response came: "I will make all ***my goodness*** pass before thee, and I will proclaim the Name of Yahweh before thee" (Ex. 33:19). From these words then, we learn that Yahweh's "glory" is seen in his "goodness". But in Exodus 34, where the promise is fulfilled, we find that the Goodness/Glory is not seen in things visible to the natural eye, but it was rather in the words that were proclaimed:

"Yahweh descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the Name of Yahweh. And Yahweh passed by before him, ***and proclaimed***, Yah, Yahweh El, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands,

forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and fourth generation" (Ex. 34:5-7).

Here is the point: the Goodness and Glory of God can be seen in the Good and Glorious array of Attributes that He Possesses. And those attributes are seen in the Word imparted to man – that which was "proclaimed". So returning to the New Creation, just as Moses requested "show me thy Glory", we read that "**the Word** was made flesh, and dwelt among us, **(and we beheld his glory as of the only begotten of the Father,)** full of grace and truth" (Jno. 1:14).

The Lord Jesus Christ is the epitome of the Word revealed, he is "the word" "made flesh". All of the glorious attributes of Yahweh that were declared to Moses can be seen in him, he is the very embodiment of those principles. He is, as is declared elsewhere, "God manifest in the flesh".

The glory is said to come to us "in **the face** of Jesus Christ". This is significant, because when the theophany was made to Moses, he was explicitly told twice that: "thou shalt not see my Face" (Ex. 33:20, 23). Under the Mosaic administration, the face of Glory could not be seen. But not only was Moses not allowed to see that Face, even so Israel could not behold Moses' face either. The record tells us that when he was in the presence of Yahweh, Moses' face shone with divine brightness. But Israel were afraid to look upon it when he returned to them, so he had to wear a veil in order that they could not see the shining of his face, until it had faded away.

Returning to the Apostolic exposition of 2 Corinthians, we read that these things represented the way in which Israel could not see the Glory of the Law: "... their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament; which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, **the veil is upon their heart.** Nevertheless, when it shall return to the Lord, the veil shall be untaken away ..." (2 Cor. 3:13-16). Israel as a nation, to this very day, have this "veil" upon their heart. They do not see how the Glory of the Law pointed forward to Jesus of Nazareth, their Messiah. But we are in the privileged position whereby we received the New Testament teaching concerning Messiah, and in the face of Jesus Christ, we see the Glory of God revealed. So the Apostle continues: "... but we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18).

The exhortation here, is that we do not simply behold the image presented to us, but we seek to become like it, in the same way as a mirror reflects the image of a person. As James expressed it: "be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. Or if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeh himself and goeth his way, and straitway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed" (Jas. 1:22-25).

THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT

Returning to our reading from John chapter 12, we read the words of Messiah: "... yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, **that ye may be the children of light**" (Jno. 12:35-36)

And again: "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth in me should not abide in darkness".

The testimony is clear then, we must not simply behold the light in a detached and indifferent sense of objectivity: we must actually *become* light. We must become “the children of light,” walking as lights in the world, holding forth the Word of Life. So our Lord instructed his disciples:

“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under a bushel, but on a lampstand; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. ***Let your light so shine before men,*** that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Mat. 5:14-16).

We must therefore not hide who we are from those in darkness; we need to “shine before men”, both in “the world” and in “the house” of the Living God, that our Father will be glorified.

James describes our Heavenly Father thus:

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from ***the Father of Lights,*** with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning” (Jas. 1:17).

It logically follows that if Yahweh is “the Father of Lights”, and we are His Children, then we are the “lights” of which He is the Father! But the supreme source of Light, even Yahweh Himself has no element of darkness: “with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” as the ESV has it. Neither should we: our duty is to shine before men, for we have turned away from the obscurity of gentile darkness, to behold the Light of the Glorious Gospel of Christ. The Father “... hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col. 1:12-13).

DIVISION

From the very beginning, there has been a division between Light and Darkness. Genesis chapter 1 tells us that “... God saw the light that it was good: and ***God divided the light*** from the darkness. And God called the Light Day, and the darkness he called Night” (Gen. 1:4-5).

The same principles apply in the New Creation: the Light shone in Darkness, and there is no amity between the two: “the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” (Jno. 1:5).

The Hebrew word for “twilight” is the word for “mixed”. That is, a mix of light and dark – which only results in reduced vision, and a liability to stumble and fall. There is a clear division between light and darkness, day and night, and this division should be evident in the way the Children of Light live their lives. The Apostle describes the transformation of the disciples:

“Ye were sometimes darkness, but ***now are ye light in the Lord: walk*** as children of light: ... and have ***no fellowship*** with the unfruitful works of darkness, but ***rather reprove them***” (Eph. 5:11).

This introduces us to an aspect of our walk in the Truth which is often overlooked and neglected. Whilst we must present the positive aspects of the Gospel to any who will receive it, there is also the responsibility to “reprove” the works of darkness. John the Baptist did this, reproving Herod for having his brother’s wife (Mark 6:18). We must not neglect our responsibilities in this area, even though it will make us hated amongst men.

DAY AND NIGHT

The Apostle describes these principles thus:

"But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the **Children of Light, and the Children of the Day**: we are **not of the night, nor of darkness**. Therefore **let us not sleep** as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are **of the day**, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and hope; and for an helmet the hope of salvation" (2 Thes. 5:4-8).

There is an allusion here back to an Old Testament occasion, when on a particular night, a drunken feast was held by the Babylonian king Belshazzar:

"... they drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood and of stone" (Dan. 5:4).

This night (vs 30), was the night in which the kingdom was overthrown by Darius the Median: if Belshazzar had not had his senses dulled by overindulgent feasting, he would have been sober, and alert to the danger. The historian Herodotus summarises the situation, by saying: "Owing to the great size of the city, the outskirts were captured without the people in the centre knowing anything about it. There was a festival going on, and they continued to dance and enjoy themselves until they learned the news the hard way".

The "saints in light" live as in the day, casting off the works of darkness. Again, Paul elaborates on this: "the night is far spent, **the day is at hand**: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly **as in the day**; not in rioting or drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife or envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13:12-14).

Notice here, we are living during the end of the night (i.e. "the night is far spent"), but we are to live "as in the day". By contrast to Belshazzar, we are to remain sober, living the standards of the Kingdom – the day to come – now. We long for the time when the darkness of the Gentile night will come to an end with the overthrow of the latter day Babylon, and the great day of Messiah's rule will commence.

THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The day of Messiah's coming again is likened to the dawning of a new day:

"... unto you that fear my name shall **the Sun of Righteousness shall arise**, with healing in his beams ..." (Mal. 4:2).

Again, Matthew 13 describes the light bearing community of the Age to come:

"then shall the righteous **shine forth as the sun** in the kingdom of their Father. Who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Mat. 13:43).

Finally, we come to Revelation chapter 21, and a symbolic depiction of the luminaries of that day: "the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: **for the glory of God did lighten it**, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are being saved shall walk in the light of it ..." (Rev. 21:23-24).

These are the days we yearn for, when every shade and shadow of darkness shall be dispelled at the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, and all the earth shall be bathed in the warmth and splendour thereof.

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