

THE DAYSPRING FROM ON HIGH

PREFACE

When the following sermon was preached by me at Zoar Chapel. Great Alie Street. London, I had not received the slightest previous intimation that there was an intention to take it down from my lips, and put it into a more permanent form than as it issued with fleeting breath. When however, I learnt that it had been taken down, I did not consider it right to object to its publication, as I indulged a hope that it might thereby be blessed beyond the immediate occasion on which it was delivered.

Though from various circumstances, chiefly connected with health and other engagements, I am not now able to accept repeated invitations to occupy the Zoar pulpit as in former years, I still bear in affectionate remembrance the days gone by, to which some allusion will be found in the following pages. I did not wish to speak of myself, still less in any self-exalting manner: but old associations so came over my mind when I entered the pulpit and looked round upon the congregation, that I could not but give them expression, and make some allusion to the sermons which I had preached there in times past, and which have become so widely spread. My feelings on this point are these. Let all that man says or does be passed by in deserved silence: but let not any of the words and works of the Lord be forgotten. I have had many testimonies, and frequently receive them still, that the Lord has graciously condescended to bless the sermons which I formerly preached at Zoar. Let him have all the glory. I never sought or desired their publication, as it was commenced and carried on without consulting me, beyond submitting them to my revision. I never derived any

pecuniary profit from them; I have never moved a finger to spread them except, as a mere matter of convenience, supplying a few friends at home who wished to have them. If the Lord blessed them, I was thankful. He alone enabled me to preach them, supplied me with every gracious thought and feeling found in them, and gave me a door of utterance to deliver with my lips what I believed and felt in my heart. I often feel that they are not mine—at least not anything in them that is truly spiritual and gracious. All their failings, infirmities, deficiencies, shortcomings,—I will not add errors, for I would not knowingly permit the least error to go abroad in them,—are mine. To me belongs all in them that is deficient, and all that is objectionable. To the Lord belongs everything in them that is truly spiritual, edifying, instructive, reproving, or consoling to the Church of God.

I sometimes seem to see in my own mind what true preaching should be; how pure and clear in doctrine, how sound and deep in experience, how firm and faithful in precept. I have a view before the eyes of my enlightened understanding what the ministry of the Spirit is, as distinct from the ministry of the letter. I see that there is a power, a savour, an unction, an authority, a weight, a reality in the ministry of men taught and sent to God, as distinct from the ministry of men untaught and unsent, as the miracles of Moses were distinct from the miracles of the magicians, or the preaching of Paul from that of the seven sons of Sceva. Let none here mistake my meaning. I do not wish to—nay, I dare not set up **my** preaching as that which I see the ministry of the Spirit is or should be. I desire with all my heart that it should be such; it is enough to make me quake and tremble with fear to think it is not so; for there are no half ministers, as there are no half Christians. An almost minister is as far from the ministry as an almost Christian from Christianity. If God has not sent a man to preach, he

can no more profit his people (Jer. 23:32), than if God has not called a man by grace, he can obtain a crown of glory. I am not saying what I am, or what **others** are; I leave all personalities; I am merely speaking God's truth as I see it in his own inspired word, and as I feel it in my own heart. Let the word of God be the standard, not my word, nor any man's; though what we believe in accordance with that word we may freely speak (2 Cor. 4:13). And following still the same unerring testimony, I believe that the sovereignty of God is as much displayed in choosing ministers to preach as in choosing men to be saved. If, in the exercise of that sovereignty, the Lord has seen good not only to call me by his grace to fear and love his great and glorious name, but has also called me from academic halls and seats of lettered ease, which once were as my life blood, to preach his truth among his despised people, he surely had as much right to do so as to call others of his servants from the loom or the plough. What we, what any of us are worth being, what we have worth possessing, what we feel worth enjoying, what we know worth proclaiming, and what we preach worth hearing, we are indebted for to sovereign grace, and to sovereign grace alone. On this point I will yield to none. Let some of my brethren in the ministry have more grace, others a deeper experience, others more ministerial ability, others more unction and savour, others a more godly, devoted life, I will willingly yield to them in all these the palm so far as I see and feel they are thus blessed and favoured: but I will not yield to them in one point, that we are what we are only by sovereign grace. On this ground we may safely meet. Here Ephraim envies not Judah, nor Judah vexes Ephraim. Here pride and self-exaltation fall; here strife and contention cease; here self drops into its right place—the dust; and here Jesus is exalted to his rightful place as Lord of all.

I did not mean to write a preface, still less so long a one, but there being a blank page or two before the sermon, I was asked to contribute a few lines to fill up the vacant space. This I have done; and now I cannot arrest my pen without commending the following pages to the blessing of that most gracious Lord whom I desire ever to serve, and whose name I wish ever to be exalted and glorified.

J.C.P. Stamford, Sept. 13th, 1858.

THE DAYSPRING FROM ON HIGH

Preached at Zoar Chapel. Alie Street. London, on Thursday evening, July 29th, 1858

"Through the tender mercy of our God. whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." Luke 1:78, 79

If I use the words without any irreverence to the Sacred Majesty of heaven, I might, in standing here this evening, almost adopt the language addressed by the Lord to Jerusalem by the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals" (Jer. 2:2). May I not almost say, "I remember thee, O Zoar, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals," in those days, some seventeen or eighteen years ago, when I used to stand up in this pulpit, for six Lord's Days at a time every summer, and the Lord seemed at times to fill this house with his presence and his glory; when every corner was filled with a listening congregation, and among them, doubtless, many who feared God, and believed in his dear Son?

I wish ever to speak of myself, and all I have or am, say or do, with the deepest self-abasement, for I know I have nothing in myself by nature but sin and death, filth and folly; but I cannot forget that for several years nearly all my sermons preached in this place were taken down from my lips, and that these have, in the providence of God, been spread far and wide, and been, I trust, made a blessing to many. From that circumstance, therefore, were there no other, I shall always affectionately remember Zoar. And now that, in an unexpected manner, I am come once more to this place, I hope, though I see a great alteration, and that for the better outwardly, that inwardly it may be old Zoar still. Though you have painted the chapel, and given us more light, though the air of heaven comes in rather more freely than in those dark and dingy days when I have gasped for breath in your crowded house, yet may it be old Zoar still, with the same good old doctrines, the same old life and power, the same presence of "the Ancient of days," and the same blessing from him "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Though I miss many old familiar faces, though many a young and many an aged head is now laid low, and many a dear saint of God is now before the throne, blessing Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, who used to hear me and the servants of God years ago in this place, yet Jesus lives, whoever dies: Jesus abides faithful, whoever declines: and where two or three are gathered together in his name, he has promised his presence and blessing. May we realise this this evening, and to him will we freely ascribe all the praise, honour, and glory.

The words of our text were spoken by Zacharias, the father of John, when he "was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied," and had a view of the grace and mercy of the Lord God of Israel in "visiting and redeeming his people."

Addressing, therefore, his infant son as he lay in his mother's arms, he spoke to him in the language of inspiration, "And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest, for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation unto his people, by the remission of their sins." Then follow the words of the text, "Through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us; to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

In opening up these words I shall, with God's blessing,

I. **First**, endeavour to describe who the people are that are spoken of as "**sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death.**"

II. **Secondly**, what "**the dayspring from on high**" is, of which our text speaks;

III. **Thirdly**, how this dayspring from on high "**visits**" them, and what it does by its blessed visitations—it "**gives them light,**" and "**guides their feet into the way of peace;**"

IV. and **Lastly**, the **source and spring** of all these blessings; all are "**through the tender mercy of our God.**"

I. How shall I clearly and faithfully describe the state and condition of the people here represented as "sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death?" But comparing scripture with scripture, and taking a broad survey of the children of men as they everywhere stand before an enlightened eye, we may view them **first** as descriptive of **the general condition of man.**

i. Man, then, viewed generally, looked upon in his fallen condition, as "dead in trespasses and sins." as "having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in him, because of the blindness of his heart" (Eph. 2:1; Eph. 4:18), is sitting in darkness and in the very shadow of death. He is sitting, as the posture implies, at his ease, quiet and unconcerned, in all that the word "**darkness,**" as a scriptural term, means or implies. Does darkness mean **ignorance** of God and godliness, of sin and salvation,—ignorance of all that is light and life, grace and glory, holiness and happiness to know? In that darkness he sits, surrounded by it, wrapped up in it, as in a dark night, without moon or star, a forlorn wretch, meditating suicide, may sit on the steps of London bridge, with the gloomy river flowing before his face. Does darkness mean **sin?** In **that** he sits up to his neck, diving ever and anon into its hidden depths to pluck up some root of sensual delight. Does darkness mean or imply "**the blackness of darkness for ever?**" He is sitting in what will prove its certain forerunner, unless grace deliver him from those terrible chambers of woe, for he is sitting in the very "**shadow of death.**" Death in sin is even now casting over him its killing shade; soon death of the body will prove a substance of which the shadow is already stretched over his head; and then over body and soul will the eternal wrath of God cast that shadow of wrath and despair, out of which he will never come.

ii. But looking at the words in a spiritual and experimental sense, I shall view them rather as **descriptive of the saints of God** when they are brought, by the entrance of divine light and life, to see and feel their real position as sinners before the eye of infinite Purity and Holiness. It is true that all men are really sitting in darkness and the shadow of death. But who see it, who know it, who feel it? Not the

dead, but the living; for the dead know nothing, see nothing, believe nothing, feel nothing, and therefore neither know nor see, believe nor feel that they are sitting in such darkness and in such a shadow. But the quickened family of God, like "the living creatures" whom holy John saw in vision, are "full of eyes within" (Rev. 4:8), and by these eyes see their state nature.

"God is light;".... he dwelleth "in the light which no man can approach unto," in all the infinite glory and unspeakable holiness of his own perfections. "Light," therefore, as a sacred emblem and spiritual figure, is an expression of all that God is in his essential being and glorious perfections, as also of the grace which he communicates, and the glory which he bestows. As, then, light contains in it the seeds of grace and glory, of happiness and holiness, for "light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart," the opposite idea, darkness, seems to concentrate in itself all that state and sense of sin, gloom, misery, and despair that a soul can feel, in the borders of time, or in the depths of eternity.

The very expression, "sitting in darkness," implies **life**. They are not said to **lie** in darkness, as a corpse, but to sit, which is a posture not of the dead, but of the living; and further, it implies **feeling**, for if a man sit in darkness, the very life that is in him, and maintains him in that waiting posture, will make him feel the darkness that surrounds him. To see, then, and feel the darkness that fills us within, and envelopes us without, is a sign of spiritual life, for when the Spirit of God, by his quickening breath, makes the soul alive unto God, it becomes, for the first time, sensible of this darkness, and feels, as it never did before, the misery and wretchedness of a state of condemnation before God. It feels, too, how it has all its life been immersed in the

thickest, grossest darkness, and, it may be, rebelling against light, if ever a ray of conviction flashed across the conscience. Darkness is a feeling. When "a horror of great darkness" fell upon Abraham (Gen. 15:12), he certainly felt the dark cloud over his soul. When Jeremiah said, "He hath led me, and brought me into darkness," (Lam. 3:2), and Heman cried, "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in **darkness**, in the deeps," (Ps. 88:6), surely these saints of God felt the darkness gathered around them as sensibly in their soul as we see and feel the dark gloom of a wintry night, when we look out of doors from our warm, well-lighted room. The blind naturally see no darkness, for they see no light. Day and night are all one to them; for to see darkness as much needs eyesight as to see light. So, in grace, to see darkness implies that we possess light and sight. As in an ocean cave a degree of light is needed in the very entrance to see the dark recesses stretching themselves far away out of sight, so, in grace, the quickened sinner needs divine light to view the dark recesses of his fallen nature, with all their hideous gloom.

He sees, also, that there is **something in true religion which he has never known** something in the things of God, as made known to the soul by a divine power, of which he is not yet in possession. This is the case and state of many a dear child of God. He has light to see his darkness, life to feel his death, faith to believe his condemnation, and sincerity to acknowledge the justice of his sentence, but no power to see himself in the light, or to come forth into liberty. He is "sitting in darkness," unable to stand or walk, go forward or backward. This he knows and feels for and in himself, and as such he has more real truth and honesty in his heart, more grace and true religion, more light and life, more faith and feeling than hundreds of high professors, who

walk in the light of their own fire, and by the sparks that they have themselves kindled.

But besides this feeling of darkness from a sight of one's own heart, and of an aching void which love and mercy have not yet filled up, there are other causes at work which contribute to increase its density. **Heavy afflictions, providential trials, or sore temptations,** will often combine to sink the awakened sinner deeper still into misery and gloom. The work of grace upon the heart generally begins under some afflicting stroke of God, to bring us, as it were, to our senses. In body or in family, in circumstances or in mind, a stunning blow is given. Some heavy stroke seems, indeed, absolutely needed to awaken the conscience and pierce the callous, insensible heart into some feeling. Why this affliction is sent he at present sees not. He sits in darkness, and therefore the dealings of God with him in providence and grace are both hidden from his eyes. He is, if I may use the figure, like one in a railway tunnel, with the engine at a stand through some accident. He is afraid to get out of the carriage, and afraid to stay in. Neither line is safe; the up train or the down train may either next moment dash in upon him. So he sits in darkness, unable to move; but longs for deliverance, and cries to God for help, for all other is vain.

Some of you may at this moment be thus sitting in darkness: you may have had a very dark and gloomy week; you may have felt. this very day, much of the hiding of God's face and the miserable darkness of your own soul, so that you have gone about of all men most wretched. Even you, who have been highly favoured in times past, who have had most blessed manifestations of the Lord's goodness and mercy. and clearly seen and rejoiced in your interest in the blood of the Lamb, may have had this day, or during this past week, a gloomy season, and been sitting in much darkness of soul.

You may have had trying circumstances in providence. Your poor body may at this very moment be bowed down with pain and disease. You may have just left at home an afflicted husband or child, or escaped here from the persecutions of a scolding wife; or some tidings may have come this morning to distress your mind, or fill it with rebellion and self-pity. Satan this day may have been haunting you with his horrible suggestions, and hurling dart after dart into your troubled soul, so as to make you tremble at yourself, fearing there is not a spark of grace, or a grain of vital godliness in your heart.

Sin, too, may have been working at a fearful rate; or the old trial, which has half killed you again and again, has once more broken out to fill you with fresh sorrow, and almost sink you into despair. What is worse, the Lord does not appear to hear any of your cries for help; and thus, wherever you turn your eyes, within or without, "through the wrath of the Lord is the land **(your soul)** darkened;" (Isa. 9:19); " he hath fenced up your way, that you cannot pass, and set darkness in your paths" (Job 19:8). Thus you sit in darkness, and can, in a measure, say with David, "For the enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life down to the ground; he hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead. Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is desolate" (Ps. 143:3, 4).

iii. But the Holy Ghost has added another word to describe the experience of those whom the dayspring from on high, visits. He speaks of "the **shadow of death**" as a spot in which they are also sitting. Let us examine the meaning of this striking expression. Death must ever be a solemn, if not gloomy subject to the children of men. We can scarcely hear a tolling bell, or see a hearse passing along the street, without a solemn feeling coming across our mind towards

that pallid corpse which we know is stretched in the coffin. And when death comes nearer home, when we have perhaps to go into the chamber shaded in gloom, to gaze upon, for the last time, those loved features that we have seen a thousand times full of life and animation, but now pale, rigid, motionless, with that indescribable aspect that a corpse always wears, such a sight must needs cast a gloomy shade over our minds.

Even where grace has gilded the dying bed with heavenly light, and we can, in faith, follow the departed soul up to the gates of glory, we shrink instinctively from the soulless body. "That I may bury my dead out of my sight," was the feeling of Abraham. But where this consolation is denied, and this dear relative has passed out of time into eternity, without leaving behind that blessed evidence which gives us a hope beyond the grave, what a still deeper gloom does that pallid corpse then create! Or when we think of our own approaching end, when we feel that death may soon invade our earthly tabernacle, and consign these lips that speak and those ears that hear, the heart which beats and the lungs which breathe, to the cold ground, no more to see or be seen by relative or friend, it casts a shade of gloom over our minds, unless we are blessed at the moment with the enjoyment of the love of God, and can smile at death,

When I can read my title clear To mansions in the skies.

The Holy Ghost, then, taking up this feeling, which is common to us all, speaks of "the **shadow** of death," intimating thereby the gloom that it produces. You were all, some months ago, witnesses of the great solar eclipse **1858**; you saw how the sun became slowly darkened in the noonday sky, how gradually a shade spread itself over the earth, and a gloom, as of approaching night, settled over this

vast metropolis. The moon, interposing her dark body between the sun and the earth, intercepted the bright beams of the king of day; he lost his glory, and went down, as it were, at noonday; and though the period was short, earth, as she sat in the shadow, mourned the eclipse of her sovereign. So death, when the Sun of Righteousness is hidden from view, and his bright beams are eclipsed, spreads a dark gloom over the soul, which gloom is here called the shadow of the king of terrors. Allow me another figure. You leave for a little while this smoky city to resort to the beautiful sea-side, and after you have been walking on the sea-beach, under the blazing sun, gazing with calm delight on the ceaseless waves as they roll in all their majestic grandeur, and feeling the southern breeze blow upon your face, carrying health with every breath, you pass suddenly into some cool cave or ocean grotto that runs deep into the bosom of the lofty chalk cliff that overhangs the shingly beach. As you pass in, what a difference you feel between the bright beams of day that filled the sky and warmed the earth into life and fruitfulness, and that dark and gloomy shade into which you enter.

I use these figures to convey the thought more strikingly to your mind. So Death, the gaunt king of terrors; Death, who with his scythe in his resistless hand, mows down whole millions of the human race; Death, who awaits his victims at every corner; Death, that soon must lay you and me low in the grave—casts a shadow wherever he comes. He visits the sick room, and casts a shadow there; he hangs over the cradle, and his shadow falls on the infant's face; he comes in the Indian letter from abroad, or with the black seal and mourning envelope put into our hand at home; and these tidings or these tokens cast a deep shadow over our hearts. Indeed, where is the place where death does not cast his shadow? where the house where this shade has never fallen?

In fact, he never comes without it. He is "the last enemy;" he is the final fulfilment of the original curse. And though death, to a saint of God, is stripped of its terrors, robbed of its sting, and disarmed of its victory; though, to the expiring believer it is but a portal of life into the mansions of eternal bliss, yet, say what we may, the portal casts a shadow. Even David, though full of sweet confidence that "the Lord was his shepherd," at the very time when "his cup ran over" with the Lord's goodness and love, calls it "the valley of the shadow of death" (Ps. 23:4). "The rod and the staff" comforted him, and "he feared no evil," but it was still "a valley," overhung by frowning mountains and dark, over-arching woods, and "the shadow of death" was spread upon it from the entrance to the end.

And yet it is but a "**shadow.**" To the graceless, the Christless, the impenitent, the unbelieving, it is a substance, for the wrath of God, which burns to the lowest hell, awaits them at the end of the valley, to plunge them into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. But to those who die in the Lord, in the sweet enjoyment of peace through his blood, it is but a passing shadow. For them the substance died when Jesus died. It was buried in his tomb, but did not rise with him, for he destroyed it when he abolished death and brought life and immortality to light. (2 Tim. 1:10) But those spoken of in the text are not arrived to that blessed spot where "they fear no evil;" they are still sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death. Death casts day by day its gloomy shadow over them, and they are in the condition spoken of by the apostle, "through fear of death, all their lifetime subject to bondage." II. Having described, then, as far as I have been enabled, the characters spoken of in our text, in conformity with the word of truth and the experience of the saints, I now come to what the Holy Ghost delivered by the mouth of Zechariah about "**the dayspring from on**

high;" and I shall show, with God's blessing, what divine truth is couched in the expression.

"The dayspring" means literally the break of day. Thus we read, "They arose early; and it came to pass about the spring of the day that Samuel called Saul to the top of the house." (1 Sam. 9:26) So the Lord asked Job, "Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days; and caused the dayspring to know his place?" The idea is, that the day springs with joy and exultation out of darkness, as the sun is compared to "a bridegroom coming out of his chamber"—the sleeping-room of night, and "rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race." (Ps. 19:5) The title of Ps. 22 is **margin** "the hind of the morning," as if the morning sprang out of night as joyously as the hind leaps out of its covert. "The dayspring," therefore, means simply the dawn or break of day. But what is its **spiritual** meaning?

i. It signifies, **first**, the Gospel of the Son of God, the glad tidings of salvation through the promised Redeemer, the Messiah of whom all the prophets had spoken, and to whom all the Old Testament types and figures pointed. John was sent to herald his approach. His birth was as the day dawn before the Sun of Righteousness arose to illuminate the dark world and was born of the virgin at Bethlehem. Thus, in this sense, "the Lord God of Israel had visited and redeemed his people," by sending the forerunner of Jesus in the birth of John. Light was now breaking in the light of the gospel day, which was to chase away the darkness of the legal night. The law was a thing of types and shadows. It was, speaking comparatively, a dark dispensation: for all its rites and sacrifices were but enigmas, dark and incomprehensible, except as receiving their solution in and by the Lord Jesus. The dayspring from on high, therefore, in that sense of the word, signifies the breaking in of the mercy and love of God

about to be revealed in the manifestation of his dear Son in flesh, of whom John was the forerunner and messenger. So that, when John came as the herald of Jesus, "the day began to break, the shadows to flee away," and soon the Beloved of the church was to appear "like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether." (Song. 2:17)

ii. But as I handled the expression "sitting in darkness and the shadow of death," as bearing an experimental sense, and showed how the saints of God, in the experience of their souls, in their inward sensations, often thus sat, so I shall similarly dwell upon the experimental meaning of the words, "the dayspring from on high," as bearing upon this felt state and realised condition. For whatever the gospel is outwardly, as a revelation of grace and mercy; whatever God has done for the salvation of his people by sending his dear Son; whatever Jesus is in himself as the Christ of God; it is only as we have some manifestation of this to our souls, only as we have this dayspring from on high rising upon and shining into our hearts, that we get any solid relief from guilt and condemnation, darkness and death. It is not the letter of the gospel, however plain and clear; it is not the mere fact that Jesus came, lived, died and rose again; it is not the mere proclamation of mercy through his atoning blood and love that can speak peace to the soul that sits in darkness and in the shadow of death. The mere proclamation of mercy, the mere tidings of salvation through a crucified Jesus, remove no guilt from the conscience, nor can they in the bare letter bring the soul out of such a state of misery and gloom.

But when the dayspring from on high begins to break in upon the soul: when the love and mercy, the grace and truth of God begin to dawn in upon the benighted mind, and faith and hope and love' are raised up by the power of God, to embrace this gospel, to believe in this Jesus, to rejoice in this

salvation, this message of love and mercy, through a Saviour's blood, is sweetly adapted and blessedly suited to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. You who now sit in darkness, and in this death shadow, do you not feel that you want something experimentally manifested to your soul by the power of God? Can hearing remove the darkness? Can praying dispel it? Can talking, can preaching, can the ordinances of God's house chase away the gloom from your mind, and roll away the shadow from your heart?

You may hear the blessed tidings of salvation proclaimed by the mouths of God's servants, in the most experimental manner, and yet go home darker than you came. You may sit in the pew wrapped up in the very shadow of death, when life is proclaimed and felt in the pulpit. One that sits next to you may be bathed in tears of joy from the light and life of heaven shed abroad in his soul, whilst on you darkness hangs its thickest pall, and death spreads such a fearful shadow over your soul that you may be meditating to steal away when the service is over, and plunge yourself into the dark river flowing near. A servant of Christ may proclaim in your ears salvation through a Saviour's blood,—nay more, may describe your very feelings, may enter into the very trials of your soul, and put his hand upon the sorest and most secret spots of your troubled heart; but no dayspring, no, not one solitary gleam of light, breaks in upon your mind. Nay, the very light of the gospel shining outwardly, and not shining inwardly, only increases the feeling of darkness in your heart.

But let the Lord appear in one gracious word; let one ray of the Sun of Righteousness break in upon your soul; let the Blessed Spirit apply something to your heart, to lift you up out of misery and death; then, as this dayspring dawns, you are brought out of this darkness which you feel, and the

shadow of death in which you are immersed, and come into the light of day. Therefore, exercised saints of the Most High, you who know what it is experimentally to sit in darkness and the shadow of death, be often lifting up your heart to the Lord, **as, indeed, you will do, for you must sigh and groan under your darkness and misery,** that he will bless you with a manifestation of himself, that you may have the shining in of his gracious countenance, that you may feel his presence, taste his love, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

But we need spiritual eyes to see divine light, be it much or little. The sun may rise upon London, but a man may be blind, and now see it; he may be cooped up in a wine-cellar, and not know it; he may be shut up in a gloomy cell in Pentonville Prison, and not enjoy it; he may be in the hold of a ship in the river, and not be enlightened or warmed by it. It is not the fact of the sun shining that gives light to the blind, or brings his rays into a prison; it is not the circumstance of Christ having come, and the gospel being preached, that will give you light who know what it is, feelingly and experimentally, to sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. The exercised saints, therefore, of God, deeply feeling this, are crying, from time to time, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance; break in upon my dark, benighted soul; speak a word to my fainting heart! Come, blessed Jesus, and reveal thyself to me in thy love and blood."

But why do they thus sigh and cry, and beg of the Lord to bless them with some manifestation of his love? Because they sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. Then that is a good position. "A good position?" say you. "What, my darkness and gloom, my trials and temptations, my affliction and distress, my troubles at home, my trials abroad, my poverty, my family sorrows, my assaults from Satan, my

dreadful heart, full of rebellion and self-pity, my mournful days, my restless nights, and all that concurrence of circumstances that sink my soul so low,—are all these good things? Is there, can there be a blessing in them?" Yes; a blessing in disguise. How so? They fit you for manifested mercy; they pluck you out of a dead profession; they shake you to pieces out of a Laodicean state; they uproot your fleshly confidence; they break down your pride and self-righteousness; and they show you what true religion is by cutting up everything but what God's Spirit, by his own grace, plants in the soul.

I am sometimes glad to see people sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death. Their complaints, when I visit them, make no harsh music in my ear. I am glad to see them exercised. I feel for their trials, I sympathise with them in their afflictions; but I know it is "through much tribulation we must enter into, the kingdom." Therefore to see the saints of God in distress has been a cause of rejoicing to me, instead of a cause of sorrow: for I know that the hand which wounded will heal, that the grace which stripped will clothe, and the power that brought down to the grave will surely raise up. Therefore, you exercised saints, you tried and tempted children of God, you who think yourselves so hardly dealt with you who this day have been murmuring under your griefs and woes, you who feel yourselves the most miserable of wretches that can walk the London streets,—if there be with all this darkness and dejection, a sigh. a cry to the Lord of life and glory to break in upon your souls, the day will come when you will bless God for these trials and afflictions, when you will say how good he was to send these sharp trials, these ploughs and harrows to break up the fallow ground, that you might not sow among thorns, and perish in hypocrisy.

I wish there were more London professors sitting in darkness and the shadow of death. I wish they were more tried, more tempted, more distressed, more knocked about, more cut to pieces, more laid low. There is, I fear, a sad want of life and power in London professors; they are much sunk in the world, and buried in carnality and death. They want a good shaking, a hot furnace, or a deep flood, to bring them into the life and power of vital godliness. Not but that the Lord has his exercised saints in this vast metropolis. He has, I believe, a people "scattered and peeled," at both ends of London. But taking the great bulk of professors at headquarters, even those who, we hope, really fear God, there is every reason to believe there are many who are sunk in worldliness; and that the grace of God is at a low ebb, for the most part, in those who are members of churches, and fill up seats in congregations. Therefore, poor dear child of God, I speak to you in the corner there, burying your face in your hands or your handkerchief, through trouble and sorrow, do not murmur and fret against the Lord for the painful things you are passing through. It is purging your heart from London religion, raising you out of the grave of a London cemetery. It you be sitting in darkness and the shadow of death, it is not to destroy you, but that the dayspring from on high may break in upon your soul.

III. And what will it do for you when it comes? **It will give you light.** It is the dayspring or dawn, and therefore must communicate light wherever it comes. "In thy light," says the church, "we see light." The first thing it will probably do will be to show you why the Lord has been bringing all these trials and afflictions upon you, and how they have worked together for your spiritual good. You will then see that not a single trouble or temptation has befallen you that has not been secretly working together for your good, and God's glory. As this light, then, begins to dawn upon your soul, you

will see that the Lord was really with you in the trial and affliction: this will make you kiss the rod; and as you feel submission and resignation to bow to the sovereign will of God, meekness and patience will soften your heart, and subdue that wretched self-pity and rebellion that have so awfully worked.

As these fruits of righteousness spring up in your heart, you will begin to bless the Lord for his afflicting hand, and feel how profitable it has been made to your soul. I have had, myself, a good deal of affliction, and I will tell you what has always tried me most,—when the affliction has passed over my head without being sanctified to my good. When I have found profit from affliction, when in it my heart has been drawn up to the Lord, and it has been attended with a blessing to my soul,—then I can praise and bless the Lord for his afflicting hand. But until the wisdom and goodness of God are seen and felt, we lack that sweet resignation, that holy calm, that lying at the Lord's feet, and that casting ourselves into his gracious hands, which when felt, lighten the heaviest loads.

But as the light increases and shines more fully and brightly, it begins to show us Jesus, and who Jesus is, and we get perhaps a discovery of his glorious Person and work. We may see a little of the sufferings of Jesus in the garden and upon the cross; of his meekness, gentleness, patience, and submission to his Father's will; this reconciles us to bearing the cross, and to sitting in darkness and the shadow of death, for both fell upon him. By and by, as the Lord is pleased to strengthen faith in the soul, it begins to take more powerful hold of this blessed Saviour; as it hangs upon him who says, "Let him take hold of my strength that he may make peace with me," light breaks in more and more; doubts and fears begin to disperse, the gloom is dispelled, and the

soul comes forth into the light of God's countenance, for the Sun of Righteousness now arises upon it with healing in his wings.

What a blessed thing is light, the light of life, the light of God's countenance, of the glorious gospel, of Jesus' face! "Truly light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun." But to whom? To those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death. How such hail the first rays of light! If you were shipwrecked, cast by night upon a desert rock, how you would hail the first beams of the morning light to show you where you were, and what hopes there were of final escape. So, similarly, how a sense of danger, magnified by the darkness, makes the shipwrecked soul hail the first beam of light, that it may see the way of escape from hell to heaven. There may be here some poor saints of God who are cast upon the desert rock, and saying, "My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that watch for the morning." (Ps. 130:6) How such hail the first beams of heavenly light; how glad they are to see any tokens for good; how blessed to them is any manifestation of mercy, any melting of heart, any dissolving of spirit, any breaking down of soul, any discovery of atoning blood and pardoning love. How sweet to them it is to have any divine light dawn upon their mind, to have any breaking in of the goodness and mercy, grace and glory, of the blessed Jesus. The more we sit in darkness, the more we prize light.

Many high professors despise all this, and run out against it as a building upon frames and feelings, and making a Christ of our experience. Poor things! Their light is not worth having; and their religion, it is to be feared, is but a fire of their own kindling, the light of which will never light them to heaven. But why do they despise it? Because they never sit

in darkness and the shadow of death. Therefore, really and truly, what is their light? An **ignis fatuus**, a will-o'-the-wisp, a gas-lamp, a meteor, a falling star, anything, everything but the dayspring from on high, or the Sun of Righteousness. But the Lord's people cannot be put off with a gaslamp, an **ignis fatuus**, a will-o'-the-wisp. They must have Jesus. They must have his blood upon their consciences, his grace in their hearts, his presence in their souls; sweet discoveries of his Person and work, the whispers of his love, the touch of his finger, the smiles of his face. They must have Jesus for themselves.

"Give me Christ, or else I die," is their feeling. But what makes them break forth with these earnest sighs and cries? They are in darkness and in the shadow of death. Were they otherwise, they would be content to remain as they naturally are,—dark and dead. But feeling their state, it makes them long for the beams of light; and when it breaks in upon their soul, they can bless it because it comes from and leads to God.

The next blessing it communicates is "to **guide their feet into the way of peace.**" What a place London would be without light! I dare say many here remember old London as I do, when there was not a single gas-light in the streets. How this remarkable invention has turned a London night almost into a London day, and changed dangerous streets and impassable alleys into safe and brilliant thoroughfares! London in utter darkness! What confusion, what destruction of life and property! So it is in grace; the dayspring that breaks in upon the soul is to guide our feet as well as dispel our darkness. There is a way of peace, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. For he is "our peace," (Eph. 2:14; Mic. 5:5), and "the way," (John 14:6), and therefore the way of peace. He has made peace through the blood of his cross, (Col.

1:20), having slain the enmity thereby, and came and preached peace to them which were afar off, "sitting in darkness and the shadow of death," and "to them that were nigh." (Eph. 2:16, 17)

The dayspring, then, breaking in upon the soul, shines upon the way of peace, and guides the feet into it. The light shines upon the way lined with blood, the way of salvation through the finished work, atoning blood, and meritorious sufferings of the Son of God. As then the light shines upon the way, and it is seen as a way of peace, a way of pardon and reconciliation, a way of access and acceptance, a way of grace and glory, a way of life and happiness, the feet of faith move towards it, enter upon it, and walk in it. This is a peace that passeth all understanding, a peace which the world cannot give or take away, a holy calm, a gracious subduing of all rebellion; and that power which once said to the boiling waves and howling winds that chafed their whitened crests into a succession of billows, "Peace, be still!" does it all.

How great the change! Instead of war with God, to be at peace; to see by the eye of faith that the whole way from earth to heaven, as revealed in the Person and work of the Son of God. is peace from first to last, and that as long as the feet are moving in that path they are walking in a way of peace here and hereafter. O to know, feel, and enjoy more of this peace, the peace of which Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you!" Oh, how sweet it is to have a little true peace, to be at peace with God. against whom we have so dreadfully and damnably sinned, to have a manifested interest in the blood which speaketh peace, and as such cries, from the ground for mercy, and speaks it when applied to the conscience. It thus speaketh better things than the blood of Abel, which cried for vengeance.

The way of peace, then, is not in rebellion, in murmuring, in fretfulness, in carnality: no, nor in worldly pleasure, in handsome houses, fine clothes, beautiful furniture, a respectable appearance, and abundance of gold and silver. "What hast thou to do with peace?" may be said to all such "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God," when they say, "Is it peace?" The only peace is peace in believing, peace through atoning blood, peace by walking in sweet communion with Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Nor are we left ignorant how it is to be attained and maintained. "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Php. 4:6, 7)

IV. But whence arises this dayspring, with all these effects? What is the source and fountain of it all? "**The tender mercy of our God.**" All comes through his tender mercies. Mercy first, mercy middle, mercy last, mercy in eternity, rejoicing, as it were, against judgment (Jas. 2:13), triumphing over, though not at the expense or sacrifice of, justice, nor to the detriment of God's righteousness, but still prevailing, through the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. O the tender mercy, the sweet compassion the pitiful bowels of love displayed in the Person and work of Christ! Here is the dawn of mercy, the first intimation of a full and free salvation through the blood of the Lamb. Here the Lord begins to speak peace to the troubled conscience, and to give the first sensible and inward evidence of an interest in his everlasting love. Clouds may arise and darken the clear face of the dawning day: but still each ray that glanced into the heart was a herald and a harbinger of the Sun of Righteousness, which, when it rises upon the soul, chases away all the mists and fogs, and breaking through the dark

clouds of unbelief, is as "the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without a cloud." when the Sun of Righteousness chases away all the mists and fogs of night.

I have given you from the text a short and imperfect sketch of the way in which the Lord the Spirit often carries on his work in the heart, and what are the feelings and experience of the soul led in this path. There may be present here those acquainted with a part or the whole of it. Some may be now sitting in darkness and the shadow of death, sighing and longing for this dayspring from on high. To you, dear friends, who mourn and sigh, grieve and groan under felt darkness, on whom death without and within often casts a gloomy shade,—to you whom nothing can satisfy but the smiles of God, the visitations of his presence, and the looks of his love,—to you the Lord will appear in his own time and way, that he may comfort your cast-down souls, and speak peace to your troubled spirits. It is his grace that makes you see and feel where and what you are. It is light from him that shows you the darkness. It is life from him that makes you feel the shadow of death. It is his Spirit, and not your carnal heart, your fallen nature, that cries within. It is he that kindles the spiritual desires, that imparts the living faith, communicates the gracious hope, and from time to time drops in the words of consolation that you feel within.

And he will carry on the work. You may doubt and fear; and as long as we have a body of sin and death, an ensnaring world, a restless and implacable enemy, and a conscience tender and fearful, we shall have our doubts and fears. If the Lord be our light, his withdrawing must produce darkness; if the Lord be our life, all but himself is death. Darkness and death produce doubt and fear, not, it may be, of eternally perishing, but doubt of our present goodness of state, and fear lest we should stumble, slip, or go astray. But in spite of

all these doubts and fears, the Lord will appear in behalf of all who fear his great name. "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it."

Therefore, my beloved friends, to whom I have spoken in his gracious name; the Lord will appear to you who sit in darkness; he will carry on the work in your soul; he will revive you. The darkness has been or is now so thick that you have thought the day of gospel light and liberty would never come. But it will come; and when it does, you will see why it has not come before. You will see the Lord had first other lessons to teach you, had to sink you deeper and deeper into a knowledge of self, of your need of Jesus, that he might shine upon your soul with greater blessedness, and make you love and value him beyond all price and all comparison.