

Battling With God

by Alan Redpath

God uses dark experiences to humble us, reveal his greatness, and prepare us for heaven, and to fulfill his purposes of redemption.

Duration: 39:03

Scripture: Psalm 2:8, Psalm 24:1, Psalm 110:1, Isaiah 45:1, Isaiah 45:3, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Struggles"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the power and sovereignty of God in the context of the Babylonian captivity of Israel. He emphasizes that even though Babylon was immensely powerful, God would deliver His chosen people from their bondage. The preacher references the story of Belshazzar in Daniel chapter 5, where the king was terrified by a writing on the wall, to illustrate the fear that God can instill in the hearts of rulers. The sermon also touches on the topic of wealth and how God rarely entrusts His people with it, instead using it in the hands of others for the good of His own. The preacher concludes by highlighting the promises given to Cyrus, who would be used as God's instrument for the salvation of Israel.

Transcript

And now let us look to the Lord before we turn to the word together. A moment of prayer as we reflect upon the message to which we have just listened. Lord, teach us the utter futility of prayer which doesn't transform us into thy likeness.

O God, as we meet thee in the secret place, surely we must bear upon us the mark of thy presence and thy power. Help us to meet with thee just there in thy word this morning and speak to our waiting hearts, our hungry souls. For Jesus' sake we ask it.

Amen. Would you turn with me in your Bible, my dear friend, this morning to the prophecy of Isaiah and to the 45th chapter. Isaiah chapter 45.

We're going to read as our text this morning the third verse. Isaiah 45 and verse 3. And I will give thee the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places that thou mayest know that I the Lord which call thee by thy name am the God of Israel. In order that we might receive all that God has for us in this verse in its spiritual application to our own lives, let me just spend a moment considering its literal meaning and its historical application.

These are words which were actually spoken by Jehovah the living God to a heathen king, Cyrus king of Persia. This is the only place in scripture where a man who is an unbeliever is called the anointed of God. He was given that title because even though he didn't realize it himself, he was to be God's chosen instrument through whom the people of Israel were to be delivered from captivity.

Just as at one time God used the mighty power of Chaldea to bring chastisement and judgment and captivity upon his people, so he will use yet another heathen power as his instrument to set his people free. In all the dynamic rise and fall of kings and thrones and empires, one after another, behind the outward event which any casual observer could see, there was the unseen hand of an omnipotent God, directing all the affairs of men and nations for one supreme object, the deliverance of his people. Verse four of this chapter says, for Jacob my servant's sake and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name, I have surnamed thee though thou hast not known me.

Now I pause a moment to put in this by way of parenthesis. This is not only a fact of history, it is the story of all history which might well be called his story, that is history. It's the truth behind the breathtaking events of the decade in which you and I live.

Cyrus is preferred in order that Israel may be released. Cyrus shall have a kingdom, but only in order that God's people may have their liberty. The Lord raises up one and he puts down another.

And behind all the drama of human events today, there is a God who is planning for his church, through affliction and persecution and chastening and tribulation, they are perfected and prepared to inherit the kingdom of God. In the early days of the Christian church when Paul and Barnabas were confirming those who had received Christ and were converted to the Christian gospel. As they went from place to place, confirming them in their faith, exhorting them to remain steadfast, they reminded them that it was through much tribulation they would inherit the kingdom of God.

He, our Lord Jesus, who has sold all that he has to purchase a pearl of great price, his church, is pressing that pearl through the fiery furnace of persecution. That one day, as the book of Daniel says, it may shine as the brightness of the firmament and having been used to turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever. Beloved, it's only if you hold that truth deep down in your heart and in your mind today that you'll be kept sane.

For if you have that truth gripping your soul, then in the midst of all tribulation, you will have peace. To return a moment to our text, at the time when these words were written, were spoken rather, Babylon was immensely powerful. We are told that in circumference it was 45 miles around it.

That it had walls that were 32 feet thick, so wide that six chariots could proceed side by side and drive abreast on them. And those walls were a hundred cubits high. And within that vast citadel, within that enormous concentration camp, Israel were captive for 70 years, 70 years.

But from that bondage, God would deliver them. And so, these promises are given to the one whom he has chosen to use as his instrument for their salvation. And the history of their subsequent deliverance is of course given, as you may well remember, in the book of Daniel and in the fifth chapter.

At the time these words were spoken, the words were considering, nothing would seem more improbable there were of course evidences that the chastisement of God was of necessity, leading his people into captivity. But in a mere 200 years, the whole of everything that is said here was fulfilled, was

accomplished. And accomplished because God raised up a heathen power in order to do his will.

I have no doubt whatsoever, of course, that God could have done this through someone who was one of his own people, a Jew. He could have done it through Zerubbabel, for instance, the governor of Judea, who after the captivity founded the foundations and the beginning of the new temple. He could have done it through him.

But I ask you to think about this with me this morning. May I suggest to you that never in all history has God trusted his people with a vast amount of material resources and material power. God does not operate in that level.

Very seldom, very seldom has the Christian church been possessed of wealth, as the world calls it wealth. God knows the snares and temptations that are attached to such. And so he seldom has seen fit to entrust his people with it.

Rather he has made good use of it, made friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, good use of it in the hands of other people for the good of his own. And so for the sake of his people, as the first verse of this chapter says, he will hold the right hand of Cyrus. He will, if you follow the text a moment, he will subdue nations before him.

He will loose the loins of kings. That means strange phrases. What it means simply is that he'll terrify them.

You remember the story of Belshazzar in Daniel chapter 5 at his drunken feast, who saw a writing on the wall and were told that his loins were loosed and his knees smote the one against the other in terror. Cities would surrender to Cyrus. Gates would open up before him.

The longest of marches apparently would be made easy as God made the crooked places straight in front of him. No opposition would be able to stand in his way. Gates of brass and bars of iron, of which there were no less than a hundred in Babylon, would all be severed and broken in pieces before his triumphant march.

Not only so, but treasures of gold and silver buried underground. The wealth of many nations collected and stored in this vast wealthy community of Babylon. All of this would come to Cyrus.

God seems to pay, to pay good wages for doing his work. And Cyrus was going to be much wealthier because he did the work of God. And very honestly when it was all accomplished, one day Cyrus acknowledged that God had done it.

I quote from Ezra, the first chapter of Ezra and the second verse when the whole story was complete and this has been accomplished. This is what Cyrus said, the Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he hath charged me to build a house at Jerusalem which is in Judea. What Cyrus aimed at in his victories we may well guess.

But what God was aiming at we're not in left any doubt about that. We're told in verse 3b, the second part of verse 3, that God's purpose was that Cyrus might come to know that the Lord is God. That I the Lord which call thee by thy name am the God of Israel.

Furthermore in the next verse in verse 4 he says that Israel might be released and that in the day of the great victory and great conquest Cyrus might know that all he'd been doing was fulfilling the purpose of God. Here was God's objective therefore in using this man. Here then beloved is just a very brief glimpse into the moving of the hand of God that moves the world.

Things that were going on behind the scene and the purpose of them. Our sovereign Lord to whom the nations are only a drop in the bucket and who will set his king upon his holy hill of Zion and give him the heathen for his inheritance and the uttermost part of the earth for his possession. What amazing words they are in Matthew 25 that I would just like to take a moment to read to you.

Matthew 25 and 31. When the son of man shall come in his glory and all the holy angels with him then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory and before him shall be gathered all nations and he shall separate them one from another as a shepherd divided his sheep from the goats and he shall set the sheep on his right hand but the goats on the left then shall the king say unto them on his right hand come ye blessed of my father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. I trust that as you have listened this morning that you may with a spirit anointed mind you may see the maze and confusion of all current events from the standpoint of the throne in heaven.

Our God is on the throne not even crucial can lift a little finger without permission from our risen victorious coming faith. He will raise up one he will put down another all of this that his purposes of redemption for his people might be brought to a wonderful triumphant conclusion. But beloved the words of this text have a much more intimate and personal application than this but I think they will be more meaningful as you consider them against the background of what I've just been saying.

I will give thee the treasures of darkness. I don't want you to listen to these words spoken to a heathen monarch. I want you to listen to them as spoken by the spirit of God to your own heart this morning.

I will give thee the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places that thou mayest know that I am the Lord which called thee by thy name even the God of Israel. Do you think that darkness has any treasure? Isn't darkness something of which you're all afraid? You remember the words of the Lord Jesus? Men prefer darkness to light because their deeds are evil. Darkness, physical darkness, suffering, mental darkness, mental agony, spiritual darkness, a cloud between ourselves and God.

Don't you think that these are things to be avoided at any cost? Surely and yet our text says I will give thee the treasures of darkness. I want to speak to you very briefly this morning, intimately, personally about some of the treasures I have found as a Christian in days of darkness. The first I would say is this that it takes darkness to put a man in his right perspective.

It takes darkness to put a man in his right perspective. You know how much the darkness reveals? Maybe you hadn't thought about that. It only reveals just a little bit less than the light.

You ever asked yourself what a strange world it would be if it consisted of 24 hours of daylight and if the sun shone all the time? If it was like that, we would assume that this little earth is all that there is and it has above it a great big fiery globe which gives us heat and gives us light. How ignorant we would be of the rest of God's creation. How ignorant of our real position in the universe.

But how much more fully do I understand the glory and power and mind of God when darkness falls? It's then I know how small I am. When the Lord dropped the mantle of darkness in David's time, this is what

the psalmist said. When I consider thy heaven, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained, what is man that thou art mindful of him? Psalm 8 verse 3. You see, listen, it was the glory of something that he had been unable to see until darkness fell, that taught him most about God and most about himself.

How great thou art, how insignificant I am. It took darkness to reveal that truth to him. It's darkness that puts a man in his right perspective.

Let me say again, it's darkness that pierces the mystery of suffering, the mystery of pain. Darkness has great healing power. I'm not a botanist, some of you may be.

But I believe I'm right in saying that there are some kinds of trees which, when they are planted on streets which are lit all through the night, they just don't grow. They suffer from a kind of insomnia, from which trees can suffer. You see what happens when the sun goes down, the lights go up.

And they're never in the dark and they languish. They get exhausted being constantly in a blaze of light from which there's no relief and no rest. And so they have to stay awake.

Darkness you see is not merely negative, it's not merely the absence of light, it's the source of growth and personal enrichment. Listen to this word from Psalm 119 verse 67. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I have kept thy word.

It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy status. What a tremendous amount of light is shed upon some baffling, mysterious experience, against which I have fought and said I must avoid this at any cost, and it must stop. What an enormous amount of light is shed upon that experience by the treasures of darkness.

Furthermore, darkness prepares me for my home in heaven. You know it was out of that strange, awful darkness, from the sixth until the ninth hour, from midday until three in the afternoon, on the cross of Calvary, where our Lord was made sin for us. When God, even God, turned away his faith from his Son as he identified himself with the sin of mankind, it was out of that darkness that heaven opened its gates so wide to every believing heart.

Oh how could you or I ever begin, ever begin to value the treasure that come out of that darkness. Every gift of God, every blessing of his Spirit, everything we have in Jesus Christ, you can go right back to its source, and there you find the force in that blackness of Calvary. 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.

Now, as I suggest to you this morning that darkness prepares us for our home in heaven, that darkness penetrates the mystery, the mystery of pain, that darkness does these things. Let me just ask you today to share some things with me. Is God taking you today among some dark experiences? Is he? Is it, is it deep sorrow of heart? I wonder.

Is it the absence of any sense of his presence in your life at all, even though you've been a Christian for years, and yet somehow it seems so dark these days? Is it personal bereavement? Even though perhaps that bereavement was years ago, it's left you so alone, so utterly alone. Is it discouragement? Is it perhaps misunderstanding and misrepresentation by other people, especially by Christian people? Is it that your service for the Master seems so fruitless, not seen much blessing if any lately? Is it a problem in your life

and there seems no answer to it? Is it a pain from which there seems no release at all? Is it circumstances somewhere and there's no escape? Is there temptation which is so relentless that there's no relief from the pressure of it? Is it one or other of these things and today you're in the dark? I wonder. Why does God do that to us? Why has he done it to me? Many times.

Why does he do it to you? Well, let me suggest, and I think that I may make this suggestion because these are things that are precious to me in my own heart. They're not just something I happen to read in a text, but something that I've proved in the years of my life. I think God puts us into the darkness in order that we might possess the hidden riches of secret places.

I think he's been obliged to do it that I might, as it were, see the star and see his greatness and my smallness. Do you remember the word that that Moses spoke on behalf of the Lord before the people entered into the land? You would read it in Deuteronomy 8 and verse 2. Listen. Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these 40 years in the wilderness, to humble thee, to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or no.

You have it repeated in the words of Job when he says in the 42nd chapter of his book, verses 5 and 6, I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eyes seeth thee. Wherefore I repent, I abhor myself, and I repent in dust and ashes. It was darkness that broke.

Oh beloved, I wonder if it needed darkness. I can tell you in bare testimony, humbly to this, it needed darkness to humble me. It did.

You ever get resentful with people? Do you ever know in a particular situation they're telling lies about you? You're right, they're wrong. You get mad, really mad, angry? Do you? I wonder. You find yourself being misrepresented, misunderstood and even misquoted, publicly as well as privately.

You find people scandal mongering with their tongues about you and you know all the time it isn't true. You get mad? I used to get mad. I don't now, by the grace of God.

He put me into a dark place to teach me how small I am, how small I am, how insignificant I am, and how great he is. It's lovely to leave your cause with Jesus. It's lovely to leave the case with him.

I'll let him work it out. But maybe, maybe when you react as you do and you get mad and resentful, God has to put you right in the dark to show you that you're not really important at all. That you're only a very little insignificant person.

And he has to teach you that the very circumstances and people whom you resent and would try to escape from and run away from, are the very nails which God is using to crucify the flesh. Darkness humbles us. Or let me share something else.

Going through the dark recently, has it been to stop you wandering and going astray? Has it been to make you say with a full heart, and with tears in your eyes, I've wandered far away from God. Now I'm coming home. The paths of sin too long I've trod, now I'm coming home.

Beloved, did it take the darkness to make you afraid of yourself? Did it take some dark experience to make you absolutely terrified as to where life was taking you? Did it? I wonder if it took the darkness to make you so afraid that you began, listen, nestling instead of wrestling. Did it? Did it take darkness to press you into the heart of Jesus? I wonder. The light has been fierce.

The glare of publicity has been unbearable. Many, many times how gladly you would have withdrawn from it all and hidden yourself a mile away. So I put you in the dark.

The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him. Did it take the darkness to stop you wandering? Did it take the darkness to stop your sinning? Did it take you the darkness to press you into the heart of Jesus? I wonder. Or perhaps he sent the darkness, as our text says, that thou mayest know that I am the Lord which call thee by thy name.

I hope you got every word of the message that was sung to us this morning by Mrs. Lowry. That's the message. Oh the treasures of the secret place of communion with Jesus Christ.

What a thrill it is if you happen to travel in another country, a strange land, and maybe you're in a crowd somewhere, perhaps with people if you don't know, and suddenly somebody from among the crowd calls you by your name. And you find you've met an old friend in an unexpected place. And a place where you thought you knew nobody, and nobody knew you, suddenly somebody greets you.

Why? That person who perhaps was only a casual acquaintance. You might, if you're not too careful about the bounds of propriety, you might go up to that comparative stranger, yet you knew him and he knew you, and you might hug him. You felt so far away from home and there you met someone whom you knew.

I will give thee the hidden riches of secret places. It's taken darkness in my life, darkness in my soul many times, to take me into an intimate fellowship with the Lord, who calleth his own sheep by name and leadeth them out. I hope I do not surprise you or shock you, but I never would seek to preach above my own experience.

And I would tell you no more than the truth, when I say that if I only prayed when I felt like praying, I wouldn't do much praying. Ah, but it's times of darkness that have driven me into a deep fellowship with the Lord Jesus, to discover some of the riches of secret places. You know, the wisest of all men, part of course from the Lord who is unique in his path all by himself, but the wisest of all earthly rulers, Solomon, once said in Proverbs 25 and verse 2, it is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the honor of kings is to search out a matter.

The glory of a king is not his little power, not his little palace, not his automobiles, not this, but his ability to search out something. And that's the glory of every king and every priest unto God, the glory of your life and mine. You watch the little child grow.

Do you remember a day when you were little children? I do. Oh, it seems so long ago now. We just sort of couldn't look above the level of the table, and had to stand on tiptoe to see what was going on.

My, and they got to a time when a few months later, at that time, well you could leave them perfectly safely doing that, but in another month or two you couldn't. If you did, I tell you, the ice cream would go, and something else would disappear when they began to be able to see over the top, and began to be able to reach out. You ever noticed how your little child begins to grow and grow and grow like that? He's always, she's always searching out, searching out, searching out.

Different levels, deeper experiences, and that's life. And we're all doing that. Now, now it's the glory of the king to search out a matter.

I once had a faith in the Lord Jesus, which is little more, was little more than a light-hearted statement of doctrine, which was perfectly sound. But my faith is not that now. It took darkness to make my faith real.

It took darkness to bring all that I believe in doctrine to be part of my very life and my very being. Do you see what I mean? I wonder if it's taken darkness to make your faith your very own. I'm sure that a Christian home is a great blessing, but I'm sure that the children of Christian parents are in great peril of a second-hand faith.

And very, very often God has to put such people, dear folks, how we'd love to spare them from it. How dear mothers would love to spare their sons and daughters from it. But very often a mother with a broken heart has had to watch her son go right away from God, until in darkness his faith has become real.

Don't despair, dear mother and father here today. Don't despair of that boy, that girl, who at this time may seem to be at the other end of the earth, miles away from God. Don't despair of them.

You cannot talk to them about Jesus, but you can talk to Jesus about them. You cannot argue with them about Christ, you waste your time. The moment you talk with them, they answer back and shut you up, and you feel so helpless and bereft, and you cannot but believe that the boy, the girl for which you've spent, for whom you've spent so much and cared so much, could be in that position today.

Oh beloved, it takes darkness to make their faith their own. A superficial, creedal statement isn't enough, and there comes a day when that which you have taught, when there were little children at your knee, there comes a day when in brokenness of heart and brokenness of spirit, they discover that you were right and they were wrong. I grant that that may be true of any dear child of yours today, who seems far away from God.

It took darkness to do that for me. You see in the early church, they built their doctrine on their experience. Their doctrine was required to explain their experience.

Now we have our doctrine, but we haven't got much experience. We try to build an experience on doctrine. There was a day, you remember, that our Lord spoke about it, when there was a man who had treasure in a field, and it was hidden.

And oh, what joy and what wealth were his when it was found and discovered. I often wish that the Lord had told us how he found it. I think it was probably when his hand was on the plow in the heat of the day, in some lonely furrow, as he was digging up the ground and furrowing and working.

Then he found the treasure, in the time of stress and darkness. You see the Lord says in Psalm 18 verse 11, he makes the darkness his pavilion. Still times in my life, when God puts me through experiences like this, I used to be afraid of them.

Still times when he just seems to take me into the dark, for a moment, and I begin to say, now Lord, what are you going to show me here in this, in this experience right now? Because I've discovered this, you see, that when you look at the dark cloud from the outside, it's all so dark, and the experience so dreadful, that when you get right in the middle, it's as bright as noonday sun. He makes the darkness his pavilion. He's there, right in it, to reveal something more of himself.

May I conclude just by saying this to you. You never can have a safety first campaign in the life of faith. Never.

Absolutely impossible. In the venture of a soul with God, there's no such thing as safety first. You discover God in Jesus Christ, he takes you on by one step of faith, a succession of steps, in the dark, one after another, and yet he promises that he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

Jesus said, I thank thee, O Father, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto day. I do pray, dear friend, today, I don't know to whom this message may have had particular application, except to my own life, but I do pray that any of you whom God has been putting through days and months and years of darkness, I do pray that you may be discovering secret riches in secret places, and laying hold of the treasures of darkness that come to you, and only come to you, in communion with God. Sometimes I like to sing this hymn.

I only do it when I'm alone, don't worry, but I do like to sing this hymn. I sing it to a tune that you wouldn't know, so I wouldn't even think of singing it to you at this point, but listen to it. You know it? In heavenly love abiding, no change my heart shall fear, and safe is such confiding, for nothing changes here.

The storm may roar without me, my heart may low be laid, but God, but God is round about me, and can I be dismayed? Green pastures are before me, which yet I have not seen. Bright skies will soon be o'er me, where the dark clouds have been. My hope I cannot measure, my path to life is free.

My Savior has my treasure, and he will walk with me. So, dear soul in the dark, hallelujah anyway.

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