

The Glory in the Rear

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that even when God's visible presence seems withdrawn, His protective glory remains behind His people, guiding and guarding them through trials with loving-kindness and faithfulness.

Scripture: Exodus 14:19-20, Isaiah 57:8, Isaiah 3:12, Hebrews 13:5, Psalm 84:11, Isaiah 49:15, Psalm 18:2

Topics: "Divine Presence", "Faith in Trials", "God's Guidance"

Description

In "The Glory in the Rear," C.H. Spurgeon explores the profound truth that God's presence may sometimes seem hidden or withdrawn from the forefront of our lives, yet His protective glory remains steadfast behind us. Using the biblical example of the Israelites at the Red Sea, Spurgeon encourages believers to trust in God's faithful guidance and protection during times of spiritual darkness and trial. This devotional sermon reminds listeners that God's loving presence is constant, even when unseen, and calls for faith and hope grounded in His unchanging character.

Transcript

"And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them, and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: and it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel, and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night." ■ Exodus 14:19-20.

"The glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward." ■ Isaiah 57:8.

"For the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rereward." ■ Isaiah 3:12.

WHEN THE ISRAELITES left the place of their bondage and came to the edge of the wilderness, a visible token of the Lord's presence and leadership was granted to them. They saw high in the air a pillar, which by day might be compared to rising smoke, but at night became a flame of fire. Such displays on a small scale were usual in the march of armies, but this was of supernatural origin. Where it moved the people were to follow; it was to be their companion, that they might not be alone, their conductor, that they might not go astray. We have become familiar, by accounts of our own soldiery in Egypt, with the extreme danger of the oriental sun when men are marching over the fiery sand: this cloud would act as a vast umbrella tent, covering the whole of the great congregation, so that they could march without being faint with the heat. By night their canvas city was lighted up by this grand illumination. They could march as well by night as by day, for we are told at the close of the previous chapter that by night the Lord went before

them "in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night." Might they not have said, "The Lord God is a sun and shield"? Did they not realize the fulfillment of the promise not yet spoken in words, "The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night"? This sacred symbol of the divine presence must have been a very great solace to them in those early days, when their pilgrim life was novel to them, and their newly-found liberty was darkened by a terrible fear of recapture.

The particular sign which the Lord vouchsafed them was very practical; it was not only glorious, but useful; it served them both for shade and light, and was both their guide and guard. It was exceedingly conspicuous, so that they could all see it. Any man of the millions who came out of Egypt could stand at his tent door and see this flaming signal high in heaven, floating over all as the banner and oriflamme of the Great King. It appears to have been continual; an abiding token, and not an intermittent brightness. Even thus has Moses written:■"He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people."

Beloved friends, God is always with those who are with him. If we trust him, he hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." There is a special and familiar presence of God with those who walk uprightly, both in the night of their sorrow, and in the day of their joy. Yet we do not always in the same way perceive that presence so as to enjoy it. God never leaves us, but we sometimes think he has done so. The sun shines on, but we do not always bask in his beams; we sometimes mourn an absent God■it is the bitterest of all our mourning. As he is the sum total of our joy, so his departure is the essence of our misery. If God do not smile upon us, who can cheer us? If he be not with us, then the strong helpers fail, and the mighty men are put to rout. It is concerning the presence of God that I am going to speak this morning. You and I know how joyous it is. May we never be made to know its infinite value experimentally by the loss of it. If we see no cloud or flame, yet may we know that God is with us, and his power is around us. In that sense we will pray,

"Cover us with thy cloudy shrine, And in thy fiery column shine."

Or in more familiar words we will sing,

"Let the fiery cloudy pillar Lead me all my journey through."

I. In considering the subject of the Lord's abiding with his people, I shall first call attention to THE DIVINE PRESENCE MYSTERIOUSLY REMOVED. According to our text, "The angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed." The chosen of the Lord may lose the manifested presence of God; and, indeed, often they may miss it in the particular form in which they have been accustomed to enjoy it.

The symbol of God's presence removed from where it had usually been. From the day when they entered upon the desert, they had seen the fiery, cloudy pillar well to the front; but now suddenly it wheeled about, and left the van comparatively dim, because the glory had departed. Those who looked forward saw it no more. So has it been with us at times: we have walked day after day in the light of God's countenance, we have enjoyed sweet fellowship with Jesus Christ our Lord, and on a sudden we have missed his glorious manifestation. Like the spouse, we cried, "I sought him, but I found him not." Aforetime everything had seemed bright, and we expected to go from strength to strength, from victory to victory, till we came unto the mount of God, to dwell for ever in his rest; but now before us on a sudden things look dark; we do not feel so sure of heaven as we were, nor so certain of perpetual growth and progress. The prospect is darkened, the clouds return after the rain, and our soul out of the darkness cries, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!"

Moreover, they missed the light from where they hoped it would always be. They had been given to understand, I do not doubt, that the Lord would be always with them; and yet now, as they looked forward, the bright light was gone from its place of leadership. They looked for it as their guide, and, behold, that guidance was gone! The pillar might be behind them, but it was not before them; they could see nothing ahead to lead them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which the Lord had promised them. Sometimes you also may imagine that God's promise is failing you; even the word of God which you had laid hold upon may appear to you to be contradicted by your circumstances. Then your heart sinks to the depths, for "if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" If ever the word of God becomes a subject of doubt, where can any certainty remain? Where any hope for the unsure? We have said, "This God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death": but what if he refuse to guide us? Then are we in an evil case. Can it be so? "Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore?"

The pillar of fire also removed from where it seemed more than ever to be needed. Now they were in a cleft stick; how could they possibly escape? Pharaoh was behind them, with all the horsemen of Egypt. They could hear the noise of the chariots, and the neighing of the horses, and the shouts of the armies, eager for the prey. Before them rolled the Red Sea in its might. How could there be a way in the mighty waters? Now, if ever in their lives, they must have looked anxiously for the symbol of the Divine presence. What could they do if Jehovah did not lead their van? Yet the token of his presence was not there. Even thus is it with you, dear friend, who once walked in the light of God's countenance: you perhaps have fallen into temporal trouble, and at the same moment the heavenly light has departed from your soul. Now, it is bad to be in the dark on the king's highway; but it is worse to be in the dark when you are out on the open common, and do not know your road. It is well to have a guide when the road is easy; but you must have one when you are coming upon precipitous and dangerous places. Is it so with any child of God here, that he sees no light to shine before him, no star to guide him on his road? On the contrary, does his future become more and more clouded? Is the track quite gone? Does the sea seem shut in with an ironbound coast without a harbor? Does he

"See every day new straits attend, And wonder where the scene will end"?

Then let him trust; but he will need all the faith of which he can be master. Oh, my Lord, if ever thou dost leave me, forsake me not in the day of trouble. Yet what have I said? It is a day of trouble when thou art gone, whatever my condition may be. Yet, brethren, our Lord said, "Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter." Pray that if you must for a while bewail the Lord's absence from you, it may not be in a time of dire and dark necessity.

Thus it did seem a mysterious thing that the Covenant Angel should no longer direct the marchings of the host of God, and I dare say that some of them began to account for it by a reason which their fears would suggest. Naturally, there was only one way of accounting for this removal of the guide, and that way was a wrong one, but one to which the Lord's people often refer their trials. I should not wonder that, if they had been asked why the blazing pillar was no longer in the van, they would have replied, "Because of our murmurings against the Lord and his servant Moses. God will not go before us because of our sins." Now, it is true, and does happen, that the Lord often hides his face behind the clouds of dust that his own children make by their sins; but this is not always the case. When the consolations of God are small with you, you may generally conclude that there is some secret sin with you: and then it is your duty to cry, "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me." But in this case God was not punishing them for their sins, as he did on after occasions. He seems to have been very patient with their early murmurings, because

they were such feeble folk, so unused to pilgrimage, and so unfit for anything heroic. Every trial was severe to the raw, undisciplined spirits of the tribes, and therefore the Lord winked at their follies. There was not a touch of the rod about this withdrawing of his presence from the van, not even a trace of anger; it was all done in loving-kindness and tender mercy, and no sort of chastisement was intended by it. So, dear child of God, you must not always conclude that trouble is sent because of wrath, and that the loss of conscious joy is necessarily a punishment for sin. Such thoughts will be a case of knives cutting your heart in pieces. Do not make for yourself a needless pain. All trouble is not chastisement; it may be a way of love for your enriching and ennobling. Upon the black horse of trouble the Lord sends his messengers of love. It is a good thing for us to be afflicted; for thus we learn patience, and attain to assurance. Shall the champion who is bidden to go to the front of the battle think that he is punished thereby? No, verily, my brethren: whom the Lord loveth he sets in the heat of the conflict, that they may earn the rarest honors. Great suffering and heavy labor are often rewards of faithfulness. Know ye not how the poet puts it,■

"If I find him, if I follow, What his guerdon here? 'Many a labor, many a sorrow, Many a tear'?"

Darkness of soul is not always the fruit of divine anger, though it is often so. Sometimes there is no trace of wrath in it: it is sent for a test of faith, for the excitement of desire, and for the increase of our sympathy with others who walk in darkness. When the cloud of the divine glory is no longer seen in front it has gone behind, because it is more wanted there, and it is no loss after all, as we shall have to show. When the Lord hides his face for a moment, it is to make us value his face the more, to quicken our diligence in following after him, to try our faith, and to test our graces. There are a thousand precious uses in this adversity. Yet it is a mysterious thing when the light of the future fades, and we seem to be without a guide.

II. Now, secondly, all this while THE DIVINE PRESENCE WAS GRACIOUSLY NEAR. The angel of the Lord had removed, but it is added, he "removed and went behind them," and he was just as close to them when he was in the rear, as when he led the van. He might not seem to be their guide, but he had all the more evidently become their guard. He might not for the moment be their Sun before, but then he had become their Shield behind. "The glory of the Lord was their reward." The Lord may be very close to thee, dear child, when thou canst not see him, perhaps closer than ever he was when thou couldst see him. The presence of God is not to be measured by thy realization of it. When thou canst not tell that he is with thee at all, and thou art singing and crying after him, those very sighs and cries after him are the holy fruit of his secret presence. It may be, the day shall come when thou shalt think that he was more near thee when thine eyes were filled with weeping after him, than when thou didst take thine ease, and speak confidently. Much of the creature, much of human excitement will mix with our most spiritual joy, our groanings and our sorrows, when we are pining after the Lord, are often more purely spiritual than our own delights, and therefore they are all the surer proofs of the work of the Lord in our souls. Oh, soul, the Lord may be very near thee, and yet he may be behind thee, so that thine outlook for the future may not be filled with the vision of his glory.

Note in the text that it is said the pillar went, and "stood behind them." I like that, for it is a settled, permanent matter. The Lord had removed, but he was not removing still. He would stay as long as was needful where he then was. That glorious angel, shrouded in the clouds, stood with his drawn sword in the rear of Israel, saying to Pharaoh, "Thou darest not come further, thou canst not break in upon my chosen." He lifted up his vast shield of darkness, and held it up before the tyrant king, so that he could not strike, nay, could not see. All that night his horses champed their bits, but could not pursue the flying host. "They were as still as a stone till thy people passed over, O Lord, till thy people passed over whom thou hadst

purchased." It is glorious to think that the Lord stood there, and the furious enemy was compelled to halt. Even thus the Lord remaineth with the dear child of God. Thou canst not see anything before thee to make thee glad, but the living God stands behind thee to ward off the adversary. He cannot forsake thee. He saith to thee out of the pillar of cloud, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." He standeth fast as thy rock, steadfast as thy safeguard, sleepless as thy watcher, valiant as thy champion.

"God is near thee, therefore cheer thee, Sad mind! He'll defend thee, all around thee, And behind."

What is more, these people had God so near that they could see him if they did but look back. Earnestly I desire you to think of this. If you cannot see the Lord bright before you, and you are very dull and heavy, then, I pray you, look back and see how the Lord has helped you hitherto. Sit not down with your eyes shut! but look back! Steadily observe the past! What see you there? Loving-kindness and tender mercy, and nothing else. As I look back upon my own past life—and I think I am not one by myself—I cannot discover, even with the quick eye of selfishness, anything of which I can complain of my God. "Truly God is good to Israel." "His mercy endureth for ever." Not one good thing hath failed; he has never left me, nor forsaken me. I have received blessings through my joys, and even greater blessings through my sorrows. The Lord's way has been all goodness, undiluted goodness, all the while. I look back, and see the light of his presence shining like the sun at noon; it is as a morning without clouds, I am overwhelmed with the boundless bounty of my God. I am unable to conceive of anything more kind than the heart of God towards his unworthy child. Well, then, God is not far away, if we look backward he is there. He has been mindful of us, he will bless us. He gave us mercies yesterday; and he is the same today and for ever. The blessings of last night we have not forgotten; the blessings of this morning, are they not still with us? The fountain will not fail: it has flowed too long for us to raise the question. If there be no light breaking in the east, behold, it is lighting up the western sky. The Lord is evidently still behind us, and it is enough; for we can sing, "The Lord liveth; and blessed be my rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted." "He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him."

A thoughtful person would conclude the Lord to be all the more evidently near because of the change of his position. When a symbol of mercy comes to be usual and fixed, we may be tempted to think that it remains as a matter of routine. If the rainbow were always visible it might not be so assuring a token of the covenant. Hence the Lord often changes his hand, and blesses his people in another way, to let them see that he is thinking of them. If he always did the same by us, every day and every night, we should get to attribute his dealings to some fixed law operating apart from God, just as our modern philosophers dethrone the Lord to set up the calves of nature. But now, when our God is sometimes before us, and sometimes behind us, and makes those apparent changes because of deep and urgent reasons, we are compelled to feel that we are the objects of his constant solicitude. "I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me." He deals with us in all wisdom and prudence. His modes change, but the changes are all from the same motive, and with the same reason, all to make us sick of self and fond of him. Blessed be his name, the change of his operations makes us feel the unchangeableness of his design; and the different ways in which he visits us only makes us value each visit, the more.

III. Thirdly, let us see THE DIVINE PRESENCE WISELY REVEALED. That the symbol of God's presence should be withdrawn from the front and become visible behind, was a wise thing.

Observe, there was no fiery pillar of cloud before them, and that was wise; for the going down into the Red Sea was intended to be an act of lofty faith. The more of the visible the less is faith visible. The more you

have of conscious enjoyment the less room there is for simple trust. Faith performs her greatest feats in the darkest places. These Israelites were to do what after all was a grandly glorious thing for them to do, ■to march right down into the heart of the sea. What people ever did this before? Modern haters of miracle may say that they passed over the sands at an unusual tide, and that an extraordinarily strong wind drove back the water and left a passage, but that is not the notion of the Holy Spirit. He says by his servant Moses, "The floods stood upright as an heap, and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea." It is also written, "But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left." The tribes went down into the dread valley which remained when the waters dried up, and they crossed over between two frowning walls of water. You and I would have needed great faith to have gone down into such an abyss as that, but they descended without fear. Moses lifting up his rod and the waters rolling apart to make them a passage-way, with no fiery cloudy pillar in front of them, they calmly marched into the heart of the sea. That was a grand act of faith. This would not have been so clearly of faith had the way been made easier by miracle and token. I know some of you who are Christian people want to be always coddled and cuddled, like weakly babies. You pine for love-visits and delights, and promises sealed home to your heart. You would live on sweetmeats and be wheeled in a spiritual perambulator all the way to heaven, but your heavenly Father is not going to do anything of the sort. He will be with you, but he will try your manhood, and so develop it. I have seen children cosseted into the grave by their fond mother; and I suppose that a great many more will follow in the same way; but God never spoils his children. He educates them for nobler ends. He takes visible guides away from them that they may exercise faith in him. Why, Job would have been nobody if he had not lost everything. Who would have heard of the patriarch of Uz? What glory would he have brought to God with his camels and his oxen and his children? These were all taken away, and then Job became famous. See how he sits on the dunghill and is much more noteworthy there than Solomon in all his glory. Where the word of king Solomon was there was power, but nothing to equal the power of Job's word when he blessed the God who taketh away. Solomon spake many proverbs, and wrote many songs; but none of them attained unto the glory of that saying, ■"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Here was a triumph of faith! Beloved, you and I lose the enjoyments of religion and the comforts of hope in order that we may walk by faith and not by sight, and may the more greatly glorify God.

Moreover, let us mark that the cloudy pillar was taken away from the front because the Lord meant them simply to accept his word as their best guidance. The Lord said to Moses, "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." That word was sufficient guide. Suppose they had said, "Lord, we will go forward if the fiery pillar leads us forward, but not else." What then? Why, they would have been rebels. We are to obey God's word as God's word. I heard a brother say some time ago that he should be baptized when it was laid home to him. I thought of what a father would say to his boy if he said, "Father, I shall obey you if it is laid home to me." In all probability the child would have it laid home to him more feelingly than he desired. There are some disobedient children in the Lord's family who, if they do not mind, will have scriptures laid home to them in a way they do not quite reckon upon. What have you and I to guide us but the word of the Lord? "Well," says one, "I guide myself by outward providences." Do you? You will get into a terrible maze one of these days. Jonah wanted to flee from the presence of the Lord, and therefore he went down to the seaside, and lo, he found a ship going to Tarshish. Might he not have said, "I must be in the way of duty in going to Tarshish, for no sooner did I go down to the wharf than I found a ship starting immediately, and a cabin vacant for a passenger. I paid my fare, and walked on board at once. I had not to go off to the shipping-agent's, and wait for the next liner, but all was prepared for me. Was not that a providence!" Yes, but if you get following providence, and turning aside from the word, you may soon find yourself in the sea, and no whale prepared for you. Our way is clearly set before

us in the word of God, and that most sure word of testimony should be followed. I have known a brother wanting to go abroad to preach the gospel to the heathen, but a great many difficulties have been thrown in his way, and therefore he has said, "I can see that I am not called to go." Why not? Is no man called unless his way is easy? I should think myself all the more called to a service if I found obstacles in my way. The course of true service never did run smooth. I should say, "The devil is trying to hinder me, but I will do it in spite of all the devils in hell." Will you always be wanting to have your bread buttered for you on both sides? Must your road be gravelled, and smoothed with a garden roller? Are you a carpet knight, for whom there is to be no fighting? You are not worthy to be a soldier of Jesus Christ at all if you look for ease. Go home! I dare say, after all, it is the best thing you can do. True believers expect difficulties. It is ours to do what we are bidden to do, not to act according to fancied indications of providence. When the Lord said "Forward!" forward Israel must go, without a fiery cloudy pillar to cheer the way. Has not the Lord spoken? Who shall ask for plainer guidance?

Moreover, God was teaching them another lesson, namely, that he may be near his people when he does not give them the usual tokens of his presence. Who shall say that God was not in the van of Israel when they went down into the sea? They could not see the ensign of his presence, but he could see their obedience to his bidding. How else did the sea in fright draw back? Was it not because the Lord rebuked the sea? The strong east wind did not of itself divide the sea; for a wind naturally strong enough for that would have blown all the people into the air. The wind was used of God to move the waters, but its chief object was to dry up the damp from the floor of the sea, and to make marching the more easy for the vast host of Israel. Truly the Lord was there, triumphing gloriously. No cloudy pillar was seen across the waters as Israel looked forward to the shore; but yet the Lord was there majestically; and you may have but little comfort of the Lord's presence at this time, and yet God may be with you wondrously. Do not so much set your heart upon comfort, but rejoice in the fact which gladdened Hagar in the wilderness: "Thou God seest me." It does not matter to the fire whether the logs are cast upon it from the front, or the oil poured upon it secretly from behind the wall, so long as it finds its fuel. To you the daily supply of grace is more important than the supply of comfort, and this shall never fail you so long as you live.

Let me whisper to you one word more. After all, the host of Israel did not require any guide in front when they came to the sea. "How is that?" say you. Why, beloved, there were no two ways to choose from: they could not miss the way, for they must needs march through the sea. No room for wandering remained: their road was walled up and they could not miss it. So when men come into deep trouble, and cannot get out of it, they scarcely need a guide, for their own plain path is submission and patience. Tried child of God, you have to bear your trouble, and when that is quite clear your way is no longer doubtful. Cast all your care on him who careth for you, and in patience possess your soul. "Oh, but I thought I was going to find a way of escape made for me. "Listen!" God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." You have to bear it, you see. Your great want for this present is faith in God, who has said■"I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring my people again from the depths of the sea." Thus, you see, the light for guidance was not needed just then.

What they did want was the pillar of cloud behind them, and that is where they had it. What was that cloud behind them for? Well, it was there for several reasons: the first was to shut out the sight of their enemies from them. We read that Israel lifted up their eyes and saw the Egyptians, and then they began to tremble, and cry out: and so God drew the blinds down that his poor children could not see their frightful taskmasters. It is a great mercy when God does not let us see everything. What the eye does not see,

perhaps the heart will not rue. May I ask you just to try and use your eyes a little now? There are your sins; will you look back on them for a minute? Look steadily. They are quite as dreadful as the Egyptian horsemen and chariots. I have looked intently, and I cannot see a sin remaining. "What, have you lived such a life that you have never sinned?" Ah, no, beloved, I have to mourn over many offenses, but I cannot see one of them now, for my sin is covered. I believe this text, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." If I am cleansed, why should I see spots, or speak as if I did? The Lord stands between his people and their sins. Jesus, who veiled his glory in the cloud of our humanity, interposes between us and our transgressions. Is it not written, "The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found; for I will pardon them whom I reserve"? If God declares that our sins cannot be found, then I am sure we need not look for them; and if he says that Christ has made an end of sin, then there is an end of it. The Egyptians shall not come near us all the night of this life; and when the morning breaketh, we shall see them dead upon the shore. Then shall we sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously, and our transgressions and iniquities hath he cast into the depths of the sea.

"Ah," saith one, "I know that my sins are forgiven, but I am troubled about my circumstances." Will you now look back with all your eyes? How about the circumstances you have passed through? Do you see anything wrong about them now? Oh, no, say you, they were all right. As you look back you can only see the glory of God: the Lord hath led you by a right way. Very well: learn to look at your circumstances through the light God hath set between Israel and the Egyptians. Who is he that can harm us? What is there to distress us? See your circumstances through the medium of the love of Jesus, and you perceive all things working for your good. Hitherto the Lord hath been our shield and our exceeding great reward. We see now no evil occurrent; he hath turned for us the curse into a blessing. The Lord has caused us to be far from fear, and has put terror far away.

The cloudy pillar went behind for another reason, namely, that the Egyptians might not see them. Their enemies were made to stumble, and were compelled to come to a dead stand. "The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil, my lust shall be satisfied upon them." Why does he halt? Why does the lion pause when about to spring? He is blindfolded. He shivers in the dense blackness, bethinking him of that former day when all the land of Mizraim quailed beneath a darkness that might be felt. Be calm, O child of God; for the Covenant Angel is dealing with your adversaries, and his time is generally the night. You will hear by-and-by of what he has done. Meanwhile, remember what he did to Pharaoh and Sennacherib. The Lord may not be before you, shedding delight upon your face, but he is behind you, holding back the foe. He looks forth from the cloud and discomforts your foes. "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn." Wherefore, stand still, and see the salvation of God!

IV. Now, beloved, I must draw towards a conclusion by observing, that THE DIVINE PRESENCE WILL ONE DAY BE MORE GLORIOUSLY REVEALED. I have been speaking about the Lord being the rereward of his people, and so explaining my second text: but I must now refer you to my last text, in the fifty-second of Isaiah■"The Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rereward." This is the condition into which the Lord brings his people when they depart from Babylon, and are no more conformed to this present evil world. I trust he has brought many of us into this all-surrounding light at this good hour. The Lord is behind us, we know: our sins and iniquities are covered, our past mistakes are all erased, we are accepted in the Beloved. But we have not to look forward and say, "The angel of God has removed." Oh, no. We can see the bright light before us still. Our ways are ordered of the Lord, and none

of our steps shall slide. We glory in tribulations also, believing that we shall glorify God in them. We look forward to the time of old age, believing that to hoar hairs he is the same, and that in our days of decline he will carry us. We look forward to the advent of our Lord with delight; or, if that may not be in our day, we look to falling asleep upon the bosom of our Savior. Before us we see the resurrection morning and all its splendor: we anticipate the risen body, that glorified fabric in which our pure and perfect spirits shall dwell for ever: we hear the voice of harpers harping with their harps, saluting the reign of Christ and the glorification of his people with him. Below there is nothing before us now but that which is inexpressibly delightful: the day has long dawned with us, whose morning clouds have passed away; a day which grows warmer and brighter, and is nearing to the perfect day. A few more months, a few more years, and we shall be in the land of the unclouded sky. What will it be to be there! What will it be to be there for ever!

"Far from a world of grief and sin, With God eternally shut in."

How willingly would I fly away and be at rest. I feel my wings; they are not strong enough, as yet, to bear my soul away; but they will be. God is making his children ready to depart, and he will only have to beckon them, and they will cry, "Here am I," and then they shall be with him for ever. Yes, the glory of the Lord is above us and beneath us, on the right hand and on the left, without us and within us. We depart not from it, though it is behind us: we are going ever into the glorious light, for it is before us, too. The Lord shall be a wall of fire around about us, and the glory in the midst. If you have come there, dear brother, stop there. If you have entered there, dear sister, never quit that charmed circle, but abide in full communion with the Lord your God.

V. But now I have a sorrowful word to say, and with that I have done. THIS DIVINE PRESENCE HAS A TWOFOLD ASPECT: that same glory which lit up the canvas city, and made it bright as the day, darkened all the camps of Egypt. They could see nothing, for the dark side of God was turned to them. I am afraid it is so with some of you. Oh, dear friends, is it not a dreadful thing that to some men the most terrible thing in the world would be God? If you could get away from God, how happy, how merry, how jolly you would be! You want to depart from him; you are departing from him. One of these days Jesus will tell you to depart. "Keep on as you were," says he, "you were always departing from God; keep on departing. Depart from me, ye cursed!" That will be the consummation of your life. To some of us the thought of God is joy, but to the ungodly nothing would be such good news as to hear that there was no God, indeed, they find a dreadful comfort in endeavoring to be sceptical and unbelieving. God has a dark side to sinners; his justice and his righteousness, which are the comfort of his people, are the despair of the wicked.

word of God has a dark side to sinners. I will tell you what they say: they say, "We do not understand this Book, it is so full of mystery. We find it full of dark sayings, and hard things, and things difficult to be believed. It is all knots and snarls." Just so; you are an Egyptian, it is dark to you. Let me call up the smallest babe in grace, and say, "Dear child, is that what the Bible is to you?" "Oh, no," he says, "it is my joy and my delight. I may not understand it all, but I love it all, and I feed on it all." Oh, it is a good thing when you cannot understand a revealed truth to feed on it, and when you find it to be good for your soul, you will not complain of its mystery. The Bible is dark to the Egyptians, but it is light to Israel.

Now look at the gospel itself. Why, there are many that sit and hear the gospel, and they say, "I do not understand this believing, this atonement, and so on." No, I know you do not; you are an Egyptian, it is dark to you. It is a savor of death unto death to you. I am afraid you will go on quarrelling with it until God ends the quarrel in your destruction. But if you are one of his, you will quarrel no longer, you will say, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. The blessed way of salvation by atoning blood I do accept with

avidity, and rejoice in it." That will prove you to be an Israelite; it will be a savor of life unto life to you.

Why, even the blessed Lord Jesus Christ has a dark side for sinners. If he were to come here this morning, oh, how gladly would I stand back to let him come forward and show his surpassing beauty. Why, some of you would think it heaven if you could but see him here and look into his pierced hands and side, and mark that blessed, marred, unutterably lovely visage. Yes, but it could not bring any joy to you who do not love him. You do not trust him; and if the news were given out, "Christ has come," why, you would swoon with fear in your pews, for you would say, "He has come to judgment, and I am unprepared. He that is not my Savior will be my judge, and sentence me to everlasting woe." There is a dark side in the Mediator to the Egyptians while there is a bright side to Israel.

Oh that ye would believe in Jesus Christ! Oh that ye would "kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little," for "Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." You can come and be numbered with Israel, for the door into Israel is Christ himself. If you come to Christ you have come to his people, you have come to safety, and henceforth "the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rereward." Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON■Exodus 13:20-22; 14:1-20; Isaiah 53.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"■145 (PART II.),212, 230.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ch-spurgeon/the-glory-in-the-rear/>

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