

The Appearance of Christ in Human Nature - Part 2

by John Gill

This sermon explores the significance of Christ's appearance in human nature, His revelation to believers, and His righteous governance as a ruler.

Scripture: 2 Samuel 23:4, Psalm 103:1, Psalm 118:27, Psalm 119:130, Isaiah 30:26, Isaiah 53:2, Zechariah 14:7, John 20:20, Galatians 2:20, 1 John 4:10

Topics: "The Nature of Christ", "Spiritual Enlightenment"

Description

John Gill emphasizes the significance of Christ's appearance in human nature, likening it to the light of the morning and the tender grass that springs forth after rain. He explains that Christ's revelation dispels the darkness of sin and ignorance, bringing joy and clarity to believers. Gill further illustrates how Christ's righteous rule is akin to the refreshing light of dawn, promising hope and spiritual growth for His followers. He concludes by encouraging believers to appreciate the light and grace they receive from Christ, who is both their Savior and Ruler. The sermon ultimately calls for gratitude and a commitment to live as children of the light.

Transcript

THE APPEARANCE OF
CHRIST IN HUMAN NATURE,
AND THE DISCOVERIES OF HIMSELF TO HIS PEOPLE,
COMPARABLE TO THE
LIGHT OF THE MORNING, AND TO THE TENDER
GRASS SPRINGING OUT OF THE EARTH, BY
CLEAR SHINING AFTER RAIN.

2 SAMUEL 23:4

And He shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain.

These Words are in dose connection with the latter part of the third verse, and are spoken of the same person. He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God; and he shall be as the light of the morning, even a morning without clouds. That is, He that rules over men; a righteous ruler over men, ruling in the fear of the Lord, he shall be as the light of the morning. Whether this is to be understood of an earthly ruler, of a ruler in and among men, that rules and reigns in righteousness, governing his people according to the rules of equity and justice, according to the laws of God and his country; executing justice and judgment among his subjects, and ruling in the fear of God, having that before his eyes, and upon his heart; considering himself as God's vicegerent, as standing in his room and stead, acting in his name, and under his authority, and so accountable to him; or whether we understand this of a greater Ruler still, of Christ Jesus in the exercise of his Kingly office, who is King and Ruler of all men; of the greatest of men, of the worst of men, and of the best of men who is King of saints; the righteous branch raised up unto David; a King that reigns in righteousness, rules in the fear of God, has the grace of fear in him, as Mediator, and the spirit of the fear of the Lord upon him, and who rules the fear of God, (as it may be rendered:) that is, governs, orders and directs the whole worship of God, as he does under the gospel dispensation, having all power and authority, in heaven and in earth, given to him as Mediator: Whether, I say, we understand this, of the one or of the other, this must be said of each of them, He shall be as the light of the morning.

If we understand the above of an earthly ruler, then the sense is, that he shall be as welcome and grateful to his subjects, as the morning light. He shall be like the rising sun, illustrious and glorious; he shall be like the tender grass springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain. The favor of an earthly prince, his good will, and goodness to his subjects, in the gentle and mild administration of his government, is (as David's son, the wisest of men says) as a cloud of the latter rain, and as the dew upon the grass.

But if we understand this of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ, as we may most truly do; then these beautiful figures and metaphors may serve to set forth the glory of his person, and the riches of his grace; and particularly the benefits of his rule and government unto his subjects. Here are two sorts of figures or metaphors, made use of: very elegant, beautiful and apt ones. The first is, That he shall be as the light of the morning when the sun ariseth, even a morning without clouds.

The second is, that he shall be as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain. The first of these we have entered upon, namely that in which the Messiah, our Lord .Jesus Christ, is compared to the morning light when the sun arises; a morning without clouds. We proposed to consider this passage, I. As it might respect the coming of Christ in the flesh and his appearance in our nature in this world. II. As it might respect the discoveries of himself to his people in and after conversion.

And III. As it may respect his government as a Ruler over men, righteous ruling in the fear of God. NOTE: Roman Numerals II and III (see above) continued from Sermon IV. The first of these has been considered I shall now proceed, II. To take notice of the discovery, or manifestation, Christ makes of himself to his people in conversion, in a spiritual manner; to which these figurative phrases are applicable; He shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth; even a morning without clouds.

As the morning light dissipates the darkness of the night, and introduces light into the hemisphere; so the first discovery of Christ unto his people, the revelation of him, in them as the hope of glory, dispels the

darkness of their understandings: for the understanding of every man is darkened, yea, and darkness itself. This is the case of God's own people, in their natural state, with respect to divine and spiritual things; but when Christ is discovered and made known to them, then this darkness passes away, it goes off it is no more, comparatively; Christ's children are no longer the children of the night and of darkness, but the children of the day and of the light.

Light is introduced into them by Christ's appearing, in a spiritual manner, to their souls, by the everlasting gospel: and in this light, they see light. By and through the light of his Spirit shining into their hearts, they not only discern the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the just demerit of it, their want of righteousness, the insufficiency of their own, the glory and excellency of the righteousness of Christ, and the necessity of such a righteousness to appear in before the judgment seat of God: but through his divine light shining into them, they see the glory of Christ's person, the riches of his grace, the fulness and suitableness of his righteousness, and the completeness of his salvation.

By the light of the divine word, which enters into them and gives light (for the entrance of thy word, says the Psalmist, giveth light, Ps. 119:130) they are led into the mysteries of divine grace, and into the wonders of divine love, to behold things which their eyes had never, no never seen before. This morning light, this spring of day to them, dispels there darkness and introduces light into their souls. And this, often times, and generally speaking, is like the morning light, sudden and surprising.

As that outward light which shone round Saul at his first conversion was, so that inward light which shines into the hearts of God's people at conversion, is sudden, marvelous and surprising to them. And as the morning light brings joy and cheerfulness with it, and makes the whole creation glad; so does spiritual light infused into the heart of a poor sinner. When Christ is first revealed to him, he is filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory; and no wonder, considering him as having a deep sense of sin, the guilt of it upon his conscience, and seeing no way of being delivered from it; at such a time to have Christ the Saviour revealed to him, his righteousness revealed from faith to faith to justify him, his blood to cleanse, his atoning sacrifice to expiate all sin; this must needs gladden his heart.

And every new discovery and fresh revelation of him, has such an effect upon the hearts of God's people; and especially if he has been absent from them some time: as it is said of the disciples, when he had been a few days withdrawn from them, and came again, then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord (John 20:20). Once more, as the morning light is of an increasing nature, when it breaks forth it spreads, and that irresistibly so is the revelation of Christ unto poor sinners.

At first, their sight of him is but glimmering and obscure; they see, as the poor man in the gospel did to whom Christ restored sight, men as trees walking: they see things in a confused manner: but when Christ had touched that man again, and bid him look up, he saw all things clearly. So it is with those to whom Christ reveals himself: though their first sight of him may be (dark and obscure, they by degrees obtain a clearer sight of his person, offices and grace. The Spirit of God afresh opens their understandings, increaseth their knowledge; and hereby their path is as the path of the just, which is as a shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day.

Thus the light which is communicated in first conversion, as it grows and increases, is like the light of the morning when the sun rises; when the sun is risen in all its brightness; when there is a serene heaven and a clear sky: so it is with the Lord's people when the Sun of righteousness arises upon them, with healing in his wings, with applications of pardoning grace to their souls: when in his light they see light; for as in the

light of the sun, we behold the sun, so they, in the light they receive from him, behold him, can claim him as their own, and say, this is my beloved, and this is my Friend (Sol.

Song 5:16). I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine (Sol. Song 6:3). My Lord and my God (John 20:28). He loved me and gave himself for me (Gal.2:20). When this is the case, Christ is as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth: when they are enabled to say, "who shall separate us from Christ? and from the love of Christ? and from the love of God in Christ?" of which they have now no doubt. It is a morning without clouds. Sometimes it is indeed with the Lord's. people a dark and cloudy day; a day of thick darkness and gloominess: they know not where they are, or how things are with them; they are ready to call in question every thing; and walk in darkness and see no light; but when this darkness is dissipated, through the rising of the Sun of righteousness upon them, then it is a morning without clouds.

No darkness upon their minds, no doubts hang upon them, no fears about their eternal state, nothing intervenes between Christ and them, or hinders their sight of him; but they, with open face, behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord, and are changed into the same image from glory to glory, by the Spirit of our God. III. I shall proceed to the application of this metaphor and figure, to the government of Christ as a Ruler over men, just and righteous, ruling in the fear of God; especially with regard unto his rule and government, as it will be more visibly and gloriously exercised in his spiritual and personal reign.

Let it be observed, that the times of reformation from popery, may, fitly enough, be called the light of the morning, with respect to Christ's kingdom. This is signified in that mysterious book, the Book of the Revelations, chapter 2:28, and I will give him (that is, him that overcometh) the morning star. Now that is said after the Thyatirian church state; which is a representation of the Church of God in the times of popish darkness. The Lord promises to give the morning star: that is, the morning star of the reformation, the phosphorus, the forerunner or introducer of the light of his glorious kingdom here upon earth.

And a wonderful spread of light there was at that time: which like the light of the morning, increased in every place in the Western parts of the world. This brought on the Sardian church state; in which I apprehend, we now are, and perhaps towards the close of it. The character of that state agrees with ours, that we have a name to live and are dead (Rev. 3:1): and yet there are some few names in this our Sardis that have not defiled their garments with bad principles or bad practices.

The present state of the church, with respect to light, seems to be well expressed in the prophecy of Zechariah, where it is said, in that day the light shall not be clear nor dark; but it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day nor night: but it shall come to pass that at even time it shall be light (Zech. 14:7). It is so With us with respect to our light in general; it is neither night nor day, clear nor dark. It is not day, as in the times of the apostles, and it is not so dark as it was in the times of popery; but it is a sort of twilight we are in; and though it might be feared, from the growing darkness upon us, that it will issue in an evening twilight, yet it will turn out otherwise: at even time, or when we shall be reckoning the shadows of evening are coming upon us, it will be light, it will turn out a morning twilight.

So stands the kingdom of Christ with respect to us; I apprehend the sun is not risen, with that splendor in which it will appear, in the spiritual and personal reign of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the spiritual reign of Christ, there will be such an illustrious appearance of him, that he shall destroy antichrist with the breath of his mouth and the brightness of his coming: and more especially in his personal reign, when he himself shall descend in person, and the dead in Christ shall be raised first; when his tabernacle shall be among men, and he will dwell among them, and be the light of the new Jerusalem.

Now these states of Christ's kingdom will be attended with great light and great joy: both of which attend the rising of the sun.--Light. In the spiritual reign of Christ there will be a great deal of light. Many shall run to and fro; and spiritual knowledge will be increased every where. Then as the waters cover the sea, the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord. Light shall break forth abundantly among all ranks of men in the churches of Christ: the watchmen will see eye to eye, the ministers of the gospel, and private Christians also, will agree in their sentiments about gospel doctrines and gospel ordinances.

Yea, the light of that state is said to be as the light of the moon, and the light of the moon as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven-fold as the light of seven days (Isa. 30:26). So great will be the light of that dispensation, that it may truly be said to be as the light of the morning, even a morning without clouds. And especially in the personal reign of Christ, when the sun shall no more go down by day, nor the moon by night; when the Lamb shall be the light of the New Jerusalem, and there will no more darkness in any sense: but an everlasting day.

And both these states in which the kingdom of Christ shall appear, will be attended with a great deal of joy. When this righteous one, ruling in the fear of God, shall take to himself his great power, and reign in the spiritual state, the four and twenty elders round the Throne will cast their crowns at his feet and say, "We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come: because thou hast taken to thee thy great power and hast reigned." And when he will reign personally, then those that have gotten the victory over the beast, and stand upon a sea of glass with harps in their hands, will sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb, saying, "great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty, just and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints; who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name?"

The apostles, prophets, and all the people of God will join in one general thanksgiving, one song of praise, to him who hath avenged their blood upon antichrist. Innumerable voices will be heard in the church, saying, "salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, be unto the Lord our God, for true and righteous are his judgments. Amen, Hallelujah." And again they will say, "let us be glad and rejoice and give honour to him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready."

So then, this morning light, when the sun riseth, this morning without clouds, may very aptly represent the state of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ as a Ruler among men, righteous, ruling in the fear of God. But I proceed now to take some notice of the Second figure here made use of. He shall be as the tender grass springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain; which may be applied to Christ himself, and to the influences and benefits his people receive from his government.

The figure may be applied to Christ himself. He shall be as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain: so it may point out unto us the nature of Christ as man: his original and descent, springing out of the earth; and the moving, producing cause thereof, the love and favour of God: and the whole may be expressive of his acceptableness and loveliness to his people; which seems to be greatly the design of this figure. 1. It may be considered as pointing out his nature as man.

He sprung out of the earth. He is called the fruit of the earth (Isa. 4:2); An handful of corn upon the top of the mountains, which is part of the fruit of the earth (Ps. 72:16); a branch out of root of Jesse (Isa. 50); a tender plant growing up before the Lord (Isa. 53:2), and our text says, He shall be as the tender grass. Now though this may convey an idea of weakness and infirmity in Christ as man, and which is just; yet there is something more intended. The tenderness and verdure of the grass, and the flourishing circumstances in which it is in the morning (Ps. 90:6), may lead us to observe, that great grace that

appeared upon Christ in his human nature, even in the morning of his infancy, of whom it is said, that he waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him (Luke 2:40).

Great grace was upon him then: he increased in wisdom, and in favour with God and man. Yea, the Spirit of grace, or the grace of the Spirit was bestowed upon him without measure. This simile of grass, is sometimes made use of in Scripture to express a multitude. The spires of grass are innumerable. Now, though Christ's person is but one; yet he has two natures, human and divine, united in that one person. He is the head of the body, the church, which consists of a variety of members; and he has a spiritual offspring, which are numerous, even as the sand of the sea; a number which no man can number, out of every kindred, tongue, people, and nation.

But I said the metaphor conveyed an idea of weakness and infirmity; and so it leads us to consider the weakness of Christ in human nature. He had all the sinless infirmities of that nature; he was, encompassed with infirmity; and was in the esteem of men, a worm, and no man; treated as the most contemptible creature: yea, the apostle says, he was crucified through weakness (2 Cor. 13:4). And, as the tender grass is liable to be trodden under foot, and to be cut down; so he, in human nature, was trodden under foot by those strong bulls of Bashan, which compassed him about (Ps. 22:12); by whom are meant the rulers of the Jews, both ecclesiastical and civil, as well as Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, and his soldiers.

He was borne down under their calumnies, their cruel scourgings; and at last brought to the dust of death: for this tender plant was not only bruised for our iniquities; but cut down as the grass of the field, and that for our sins and transgressions. But he arose again as grass after it is cut down; and therefore the resurrection of the dead, and even of Christ himself, is signified thereby; as in Isaiah 26:19, Thy dead men shalt live, together with my dead body shall they arise: awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead, just as it casts out its herbs and plants, under the influence of rain and dew.

So Christ, though he was crucified through weakness, lives by the power of God: and though he was put to death in the flesh, was quickened in the Spirit; and though he was dead, is now a live, and lives for evermore. 2. The original of Christ, in his human nature, is here expressed by the tender grass springing out of the earth. It is true, indeed, he is said to be the Lord from heaven (1 Cor. 15:47). He is the Lord: he is Jehovah; and he is from heaven, which is the seat of his habitation and glory; from thence he came, (not by change of place, but by assumption of nature) into our world: therefore is said to come down from heaven, to do the will of his Father, which is in heaven: and because of the glory and excellency of his person, he is said to be above all.

But as to his original as man, he is of the earth. He did not descend from heaven, bringing his human nature with him, as he will do when he appears a second time, without sin, unto salvation, he took human nature from the earth; that is, he took it of an earthly woman: He was made of a woman (Gal. 4:4). The human nature of Christ was made in secret, in the lowest parts of the earth, and from thence it sprang; which probably is the meaning of that expression, Psalm 85:11, , truth shall spring out of the earth: that is, he who is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6).

The truth of all promises, prophecies, types, and figures: the true tabernacle which God pitched, and not man, that sprung out of the earth. And this may also denote, the meanness of our Lord's descent as man. He sprung out of the earth; out of Jesse's family, when that was, as it were, cut down to the roots so he is

said to be a root springing up out of a dry ground (Isa. 53:2). His supposed father a carpenter, his mother a poor virgin in Israel; which was what disgusted the Jews.

Is not (say they) this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? Poor Mary in such a place? Are not his brethren and sisters all with us? Do not we know them; what a mean company they are? what poor people they be? and therefore they treated him with the utmost contempt. 3. The moving, producing cause of this tender grass springing out of the earth, is ascribed to clear shining after rain. As grass springs up apace, and revives much after a shower of rain, and the clear shining of the sun upon it; so our Lord is represented as growing up in like manner.

By this clear shining after rain, we may understand the love and favour of God; whose favour is light: and when it is manifested, the people of God have light and joy in their souls. Nothing is more desirable to them, than to have the light of that morning, and to walk in that light. So the good-will and favour of God may be compared to rain; for if the favour of an earthly prince, may be said to be as the latter rain, and as the dew upon the grass much more the favour of the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

Now our Lord's springing up as the tender grass, or his appearance, as man, is owing to the love and favour of God. Zechariah, the father of the forerunner of our Lord, John the Baptist, in his song, says, that it is through the tender mercy of our God, the day-spring from on high hath visited us (Luke 1:78). That is, the Messiah, the Sun of Righteousness, which made the glorious day of the gospel: his rising and appearance he ascribes to the free grace and mercy of God. And to this also the angels ascribe the incarnation of our Lord: his coming in the flesh; his springing up as the tender grass out of the earth.

They unitedly sing this song, Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace, good-will toward men (Luke 2:14). Yea, our Lord himself ascribes his mission, primarily, to the love of God. God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son; that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16). And, indeed, there is no one instance in which the favour, good-will, and loving-kindness of God are so displayed, as in the mission and gift of Christ.

The apostle says, that God hath shewn forth the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:7): that is, in his kindness in sending and giving Christ to us, and for us. He observes, that not only the kindness and goodness of God are here expressed, but the riches thereof; yea, the exceeding riches of his grace. The Lord, in order to shew his love to Israel, says, since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable; and I have loved thee: therefore, will I give men for thee, and people for thy life (Isa. 43:4).

This was doing a great deal; but is nothing, no nothing at all, in comparison of his giving his Son to, and for his people. He gave his own Son, his only begotten Son; and when it is considered for what purpose he was given, may we not say with the apostle, Herein is love! herein is love amassed together: herein is love, here it centers; herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10). For God to send his Son to be the propitiatory sacrifice; that this should be his love, and favour, and good-will towards us, to make the soul of his Son an offering for sin; that he should part with him; give him up for us all: herein has he manifested his love in the highest degree.

That while we were yet sinners Christ should die for us: O wonderful love! This is the clear shining after rain, to which is owing the descent of our Lord; and his springing up in the world to save poor, lost sinners. 4. This metaphor leads us to view the loveliness of Christ. As the grass looks exceeding gay and cheerful,

comely and beautiful, after a shower of rain, when the sun shines upon it; so amiable does our Lord appear to his people. This fruit of the earth, is said to be comely and excellent (Isa. 4:2): comely and excellent to his saints; to those who have any spiritual sight of him, he is the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely.

This fruit of the earth is also said to be glorious (Isa. 4:2); which may denote the glory of his divine person, as the Son of God; who is the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person. His glory, as Mediator, full of grace and truth: the glorious man, adorned with all the gifts and graces of the Spirit of God. His glory after his resurrection from the dead. The glory even of his body; according to which the bodies of the saints at the resurrection morn will be fashioned, His glory at the Father's right hand, as sat down with him upon his throne; angels, principalities, and powers, being made subject unto him (1 Pet. 3:22).

And especially in his government; both in his spiritual and personal reign. O how lovely wilt he appear then; when he, and he alone shall be exalted, and reign before his ancients gloriously. Thus this figure and metaphor may be applied to our Lord Jesus Christ, I thought to have said a few things to show how this may be applied to the influences and benefits his people receive from him, under his government: and then the sense is this; "He shall cause his people, who are like grass springing out of the earth, to be like that, as it appears after clear shining after rain."

Or, he shall be to them, who are compared to grass springing out of the earth, more than rain; for so the words may be rendered. That is, he is more to them than rain, and the clear shining after it; but I cannot now enlarge on this subject. To conclude, Let us learn to bless the Lord for what Christ is already unto us, If he is unto us as the light of the morning, a morning without clouds; if his light has shone into our hearts, and we have had a discernment of spiritual things; let us bless God for this light, and say, as the Psalmist did, Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name: bless the Lord, O my soul; and forget not all his benefits (Ps. 103:1, &c.)

And again, blessed be the Lord, who hath shewn us light (Ps. 118:27). Spiritual light, caused light to shine into our dark hearts, and gave us the light of the knowledge of the glory of himself, in the face of Jesus Christ. Let it be our great concern, therefore, to shew forth the praises of him, who has called us out of darkness, into his marvelous light: and to walk as children of the light, and of the day; putting off the works of darkness, and putting on the whole armor of light: putting on Christ Jesus; and making no provision for the flesh, to obey it in the lust thereof.

And this may lead us to look for what will be hereafter, when Christ will come down, like the rain upon the new mown grass, and like showers of rain to water the earth; to those days, when the righteous shall flourish, and there will be abundance of peace, as long as the sun and moon endureth.

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