

Light, Love and Life

by John Nelson Darby

The Gospel of John presents Christ as the Light being amongst them, and rejected, and emphasizes the importance of being born again and having a new nature to be partaker of the divine nature.

Scripture: John 1:11

Topics: "New Birth", "Light of Christ"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the profound difference in the Gospel of John, which presents Christ as the Light that was rejected by humanity. He explains that while grace reigns, the state of man is judged for loving darkness over light, leaving all without excuse. Darby highlights the necessity of being born again and the impossibility of improving the sinful nature of man, stressing that true faith is not merely belief based on evidence but a transformative experience. He illustrates that Christ's sacrifice was essential for salvation, revealing God's love and righteousness, and that through faith in Him, believers are brought into a new condition of acceptance before God. The sermon concludes with a call to recognize our need for Christ and the grace that allows us to stand in the light of God's love.

Transcript

Every one who has any amount of spiritual intelligence remarks the difference between this and the three preceding Gospels. They present Christ, be it as Son of David, or Messiah, or Servant, or Son of Man, as may suit the individual case, and as such to be received by men; but John speaks of the Light being amongst them, and rejected. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." Thus we get the whole state of man judged, grace reigning, no doubt, but flesh judged for rejecting the Light. "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." The totally lost state of man is brought out - utterly lost, and yet no matter how vile, the light is come to him, and all are left without excuse. Then we get in the passage which refers to Moses lifting up the serpent - "That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." Not only is this presentation made that they may escape the righteous wrath of God, but that they may be put into a new condition before Him.

I do not - God forbid that I should - weaken the force of the passage which speaks of coming judgment. This we shall see is inevitable. But I am not here to reproach you who are out of Christ with your sins. I want to show you, as I may be able, what the flesh is, and the impossibility of bettering it. Though one hears a great deal about social reform, it is all false. You cannot better a thing which is hopelessly bad; it is

judged, condemned, and you can do nothing with it but confess that it is so.

This Gospel assumes all that is in the other three, and then goes on beyond them - the same truth, of course, but differently presented. John deals with things not suited to the other testimony, equally precious in its own way. It is most important for us while presenting the grace of God in all its fulness to recollect where we are, to get a full consciousness of it. We need this, my brethren; it gives power, and the poor unsaved one needs it too. Now if I be saved, I am in Christ, not only out of condemnation, but in acceptance before God in Christ, and He in me. But the poor sinner is still in darkness, and "the wrath of God abideth on him." In darkness - this is his condemnation, for light is come into the world, and he has loved darkness rather than light, because his deeds are evil. This is the Spirit's testimony of the world, where so much is made of man, and so little of Christ. Christ has been cast out, and now He is left out.

It is well to see flesh in its true colours: "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." "Good Master," said one "There is none good, but one, that is God," replied the perfect One. This is no mere theory, but a terrible fact, that we should know in our hearts. So utterly bad are they that the effect of having the light presented is just to have it rejected, and the rejection of the light is necessarily followed by judgment. What is judgment? Just the revelation of all the thoughts, words, and works of men which are going on now - every secret thing as well as the more glaring - unless, indeed, the precious blood has washed them all away. But this is another thing. God's terms now with man are not law. He has not in this dispensation sent out a rule whereby man is to walk; but He has sent His light into the world, and He calls man to walk in it. Law was all right in its place, and even now it is useful in convicting man; but this is not our place, but the light is here, and reveals to us that we cannot stand for one moment in ourselves before it. The light convicts us; it makes manifest what a man is; but when we walk in the light as He is in the light - in Christ - of course, what can judgment bring out? That I am there according to the measure of Christ's perfection, and the perfectness of His finished work. There is no judgment for that. Judgment does come. Solemn truth! And the apostle says, "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost" (2 Cor. 4:3). We are without excuse, for light is come to show us what we are; but if, through grace, there be the smallest desire in our hearts to be with God, like Christ - what a mercy that the light is here to reveal the way. There is no uncertain sound here. God is come down to reveal to us His own mind, what His righteousness required, and how the whole thing has been met. He brings down the light of God, and love too - but we are speaking of light - to my soul; and if we are in earnest, this makes us very thankful; if I reject it, it is another thing, of course. Light and truth are come, thank God, not in judgment, but in grace.

Now there are two things spoken of here which I would press upon you, though, perhaps, you think there is no necessity, the theme is so well known I allude to being born again, and the work of Christ. "Ye must be born again;" and "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up." But there is yet another thing connected with these which I think too much overlooked. "Many believed in his name when they saw the miracles which he did." Now I give those people credit for sincerity. They did believe upon evidence, naturally so; but this was not faith, not being born again. I ask a man, "Do you believe in Christ?" He says, "Of course I do - I have been hearing about Him all my life." Is this faith in Christ? If such a man stood by and saw the dead raised, he too would have believed as those men did; but is that new birth? No wonder that we read, "Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man." But we find something more in Nicodemus. So far as the beginning, he was no better, for he says, "We know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles which thou doest except God be with him." But you see Nicodemus feels a need, and he does not go on like the others to their old occupations

and forget all about it. No, he comes to Christ to learn more; and this is the way the Spirit ever works. He creates a need, and brings it to the source of blessing. But the moment a man feels this, he has an instinctive knowledge that all will be against him. He is a man of the Pharisees, a ruler of the Jews, a master in Israel; but this makes matters worse, for he must come to the poor carpenter's son, as he thought, and truly it was so, according to the position the Lord was pleased to take. To the eye of faith, of course, He was "that holy thing," but to the natural eye a carpenter's son. So Nicodemus comes by night; he comes nervously, but he comes. He has a question about appropriation to himself, and he must have it answered; the awakened sense of need must be satisfied.

Tell me, beloved friends, have you no need? I never in all my experience knew even one person who came to Christ without being compelled to do so by a sense of need. Nicodemus comes and applies to Him as a teacher. No, no, says the Lord, I am not going to teach flesh, Nicodemus; it is not a question of teaching yet. You must get another life first; you must be born again; you do not want teaching until you get life. It was teaching of the highest order, but he had not the spiritual faculties to coalesce with it. Christ meets him by showing the absolute necessity of a new nature, and this on the ground of redemption - a thing which all Christians profess to believe; but to my mind it is an immense reality. Do not you see what it is? I have nothing - nothing in me which can have to do with God, even as a Christian. There is nothing in myself which can please God. I can only receive from Him. Flesh never ceases to be flesh. I must be born of the Spirit, partaker of the divine nature, born of God, but I must not confound this with responsibility. I am responsible as born of Adam. I have a conscience or power of discerning good from evil. I feel that I do evil and not good. Then I am lost. This evil thing cannot be spared; it must perish. I must be born again; or, as one sometimes says, cut down and grafted. The light and truth of God reveals this to me.

Now this was very new teaching for the Jews - God's chosen ones; but the time had come when they must learn the lesson, that neither Jew nor Gentile can stand before the light of God. "Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye" (Jews) "must be born again." They were the children of the kingdom; but He comes at the root, not of dispensational teaching, but of nature. People talk of God's image being restored. All utterly false. A new creation, divine nature, is the thing we need. On this common ground of nature Jew and Gentile both stood alike, and both must be born again. Indeed, so far as this truth goes, Nicodemus, if he had spiritual intelligence, might have known it. As a master in Israel he must have been familiar with the Prophets; and we get this truth clearly brought out in Ezekiel 26. But he did not know it. And now we get the positive testimony of heaven. No man had been in heaven and come down to tell us about it. Paul was there; but utterance on this subject was denied him. But here is One who had been there, in the bosom of the Father, who came down to reveal that Father's heart to us, and who, while speaking there in very manhood to Nicodemus, could say He was in heaven, because divine. So it is now He keeps us informed by His Spirit concerning what is in heaven.

Here I find the Son of Man, one of us in a certain sense, having been born of woman, and yet so entirely divine as to be still in heaven, and I get the "ye must" - unwillingness at man's side, and all the love at God's. He shows me here, that I have nothing to do with heaven at all, unless another stands between God and me, or rather between me and God. This I learn from the One on earth, who is in heaven. I may lay hold of this by faith, and come with Christ in my hand, like Abel, and God testifies not to me, but to my gifts, for Christ is their measure. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." What does that mean? That the world had done with Him, and His testimony amongst men was closed. "Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the Prince of this world be cast out." Where do I see the perfect judgment of this world? In the putting away of sin, and a man standing out alone, in divine righteousness, at the

other side.

Now if any was to be saved, it must be through Him - the perfect One. The world cast Him out, it is true; by wicked hands they crucified and slew Him; but we know that they were just the instruments of God's love to put One who could stand it, in the breach for us. It was not the Jewish promises, but the Lamb of God come to take away the sin of the world. Isaac asks, "Where is the lamb?" Abraham replies, "God will provide himself a lamb." And here we find Him, crucified and slain, or all must be lost; the victim of propitiation provided by God; a man, taking man's place, and drinking the cup of wrath for us, yet this man is God's own Son.

Some persons are ever looking at God as though He were a judge; quite true, so He is. And they look at Christ as if He were all love; quite true, infinite love, surely. But while God is a judge, and Christ is love, they leave out that which would make their opinion the truth of God. This well known verse sets the thing right - "For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." God gave Him because of His love. Christ came in love, to bear the judgment of sin; for sin was there, and God's righteousness must judge it. Love is there. He gives His Son. Obedience is there in love. He comes to do the Father's will. This is very plain I learn from it, that because of the righteousness of God, a propitiation must be offered, and I find the Son of Man coming to offer it, responsive to the heart of God; and this Son of Man is Son of God, given by love.

He would not abide alone. He would die, in order to have His brethren with Him. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Thus we get all the wondrous counsels of God brought out. He who dwelt in His bosom, the Son of His love, must suffer alone. The veil is rent, He is forsaken, the disciples leave Him. He who could summon the hosts of heaven, is unattended by one angel minister. The Father withdraws from Him, for He must drink the cup alone, and all because - hear it, my friends! - "God so loved the world!" God and Christ were one in the eternal counsels, of course, and righteousness and holiness forbid us to be in God's presence, and their love provides a remedy - a means to bring us in. The veil is gone; no hiding in thick darkness now; we are "in the light as he is in the light."

But we get Himself first as lifted up. The altar was not in the holy place, but outside. Any one seeking God must have met the altar before he entered the holy place. The altar first, and then abundant entrance. Now I am in the light, and in coming to God I come in the fulness of His light, and here I learn not judgment, for there is no judgment where I am, but perfect, perfect love, divine love!

Have your souls got the consciousness of your need? To feel your need is a good sign. The Spirit must be at work where need is felt. Now, if so, you learn that He was rejected, and the effect of His having been cast out - slain, if you will - was the putting away of your sins for ever. Do you own that you are guilty, and, as such, lost? That in you dwelleth nothing but enmity against God? You have in spirit rejected Him, cast Him out, but God made this the occasion of working a work whereby all, the very vilest, may be brought in divine righteousness into His presence unblameable, by faith in Him whom He raised from the dead, because death could not hold Him. The spotless One is raised for our justification, and now I am reconciled to God by the death of His Son. Then I learn that God always loved me.

The Lord give us to rejoice in the truth that God Himself did the work which brings us into His presence in righteousness. Amen.

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