

The Tabernacle

The Darkness Of The World and How It Was Prepared For The Coming Of The Light

Readings

John 1:9; 8:12

Introduction

There are things in life which can be very frightening, such as the reverberating of thunder, an earthquake, silence, but possibly one of the most frightening is “darkness,” a pitch blackness.

Illustration: Some years ago I was flying from Fiji to Los Angeles on a night flight. As I looked out of the window you could see nothing, no stars, no ocean to look down upon, not even the wing of the aircraft, just pitch blackness. As I looked out I thought of an aircraft that recently had crashed at night into the ocean and I considered the dreadful panic of those on board with not a light in the aircraft. Those passengers had no way of knowing how fast they were falling or anything. It must have been dreadful, a terror that was intensified by the darkness. It was, to me, a picture of every unsaved individual whither they know it or not. They live in spiritual darkness now, and face an eternity of blackness and darkness (Matt. 25:30).

Aspects of Darkness

When we speak of darkness it is evident that not all “darkness” is the same, for there is:

- a) “Physical darkness” such as a room in the middle of the night, or a night when the light of the moon and stars cannot be seen.
- b) “Intellectual darkness” as when a person cannot understand something. For instance, if I tried to understand Einstein's “Theory of relativity”, and not knowing the slightest thing about physics and quantum, I would be in a state of intellectual darkness.
- c) “Moral darkness”, when a person is either incapable of understanding the full impact and seriousness of what they are doing or has a seared conscience (1 Tim. 4:2). The Lord prayed for those who crucified Him saying: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Lk. 23:34). Of course they knew what they were doing, but they did not have the moral enlightenment due to sin blinded minds to morally comprehend the seriousness of that which they were doing.
- d) “Spiritual darkness” is the worst darkness, which is the condition of every unsaved individual. This is a darkness the Holy Spirit referred to when it is recorded: “God gave them over to a reprobate mind”. Such are in moral darkness and do not understand the depth of their depravity (Rom. 1:28). Universally man is in spiritual darkness and therefore cannot make true evaluations, or see things clearly. In this state one thinks they can work their way to heaven, that their good deeds will outweigh their bad deeds, or that they are more spiritual than others.
- e) True Light can only come from divine persons. Christ is the Light of the world (Jn. 8:12); the Holy Spirit enlightens (Eph. 1:17-18; Heb. 6:4); and God who is Light (1 Jn. 1:5). Christ as the Light came into the world to lighten every man and He can discern clearly. Before the Lord came, what darkness man was in. I listen to the plaintive cry of Job: “Neither is there any daysman betwixt us” (Job 9:33); and again, “Oh that I knew where I might find Him!” (Job 23:3). Christ, the Light of the world, had not yet come.

The Preparation Of The World For The Coming Of Messiah And The Gospel Message

For the environment to be readied for Messiah to come there was prepared a readiness along two avenues, preparation through Israel and the heathen world. In the thousands of years of preparation man had, by his experiences, learnt there was a need which all the physical or emotional prestige of this world could not bestow. There was an emptiness within and no satisfaction. Furthermore, without the enlightenment from God there was confusion and dread. God knew the needs of man, but man did not. The consideration was, “How can God cause man to see the dreadfulness of his plight?” The answer was simple, provide a law that manifested the

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absoluteness of God (Ex. 20:1-17) and letting man go his own way and learn the bitter lessons (Rom. 1:21-31). It was not that God was inactive throughout the generations, indeed, behind the scenes God was moving. The ways of God necessitated man learning:

- a) The blessings and inadequacies of the Jewish religious world
- b) The aesthetic richness and emptiness of the heathen world
- c) The yearnings and failures of the present world.

The Blessings And Inadequacies Of The Jewish Religious World

God gave to His ancient people the law and the hope of Messiah (Rom. 9:4-5). They were a blessed people. Due to sin they were dispersed and God used the dispersion of Israel for four hundred years to scatter and then build synagogues; translate the scriptures into Greek; hold faith in the singularity of God; maintain a religious consciousness; religious worship; and a fervency for the scriptures; but they were still sinners and discover, despite their promise, they could not keep the law (Ex. 24:7).

However, due to the weakness of man to keep the law, it spelt failure because the law was incapable of giving man the power to keep its precepts. It was “weak through the flesh” (Rom. 8:3) and was a taskmaster worse than any Egyptian, for this one had no mercy, demanding 100 % all the time. Despite his best intentions, man failed.

The very system of law was characterized by failure for the sacrificial system was inadequate to remove the burden of a guilty conscience (Heb. 10:2); take away sins (Heb. 10:11); permit man to come to God (Ex. 24:1); or give the power of new life to the offerer. Thousands of animals died and their blood was shed, but they never suffered for sins. They could never satisfy the claims of the Holy God and they brought sins to remembrance every year (Heb. 10:3). It was darkness. Furthermore, it was a religion which left:

- a) Unanswered questions such as, what of the cry of Abel’s blood, was his blood ever righteously avenged? (Gen. 4:10)
- b) Unfulfilled prophecies such as, “the seed of the woman would bruise Satan’s head” (Gen. 3:15); “a prophet like unto me shall the Lord raise up” (Deut. 18:15, 18); “Behold, my servant shall deal prudently” (Isa. 52:13); “Behold, thy king cometh . . . lowly, and riding upon an ass” (Zech. 9:9).
- c) Pointless ceremonies: For instance:
 - i) What was the value of the Burnt offering, was it an end itself, or did it point to something greater (Lev. 1:2-17)
 - ii) What was the value of the great day of Atonement? (Lev. 23:26-32); the Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:28), the Red Heifer (Num. 19:1-10), or the garments of the priest and all the ceremony attached to them (Ex. 28:2; 29:29).
- d) Unachieved Purposes:
 - i) What about the promise of God to Abraham to give him the land? (Gen. 13:17)
 - ii) What about the promise to David to give him a Son and kingship? (Psa. 89:3-4)
 - iii) What about the re-union of Israel and Judah? (Ezek. 37:1-22)

Preparation Of The Heathen World Through The World Powers

1) Egypt

- a) What a great lifestyle Egypt offered. There was good education with a great library at Alexandria. Scientifically they were amazing especially when one considers the brilliance of their embalming process, and when it came to the building world, the pyramids which are still standing today and the obelisks cannot be matched. It appeared in every way to be a magnificent world. However, there were certain things it could not provide, such as peace with God, a conscience cleared from the guilt of sin, and assurance of what would happen after death. Nothing it offered could give peace or satisfaction.

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2) Babylon

- a) It must have been wonderful in many ways to live in ancient Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar was a very brilliant and clever man. When he conquered a nation he brought the best that they had in every fine art and brought them to Babylon. They had the most beautiful music, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, namely the hanging gardens. Through this center of the city flowed the River Anna and the city was beautified by it's glazed tile buildings and arches. It also must have been a beautiful place to live and yet it could not provide salvation or satisfaction.

3) Greece

- a) Greece was an exceedingly exciting place to live in its heyday as long as an individual was in good company with one of the Caesars. They had magnificence of culture as one would see if they go to Athens or Thessalonica. They had exceedingly rich ports and amongst the philosophers there were few as great as Socrates. They lived for the development of the human body, both male and female and yet it also could not provide satisfaction or salvation.

4) Rome

- a) Rome, as a world power, was the last great world power which has been seen to this present time. Living under rule there was developed universal freedom of travel, peace, and if one was interested in sports there was the spectacular arenas with the gladiators fighting against each other, and tragically Christians been fed to the lions. It was a place of universal power and there was great prestige in being a Roman, but just as in the other cases, nothing offered could give satisfaction, peace, or salvation.

Summarized

Politically the world was void of any real life. All humanity was left wanting morally. Religion was good but it did not save or satisfy, neither could the fine arts, civil law, or Roman prestige. It was a world in which was a real case history of the parable of the prodigal son. Man took all the prodigal son had and them left him emptied, hungry, and without anything to satisfy.

Universally There Was:

- 1) The needs of the human spirit. Man had three great needs, namely:
 - a) The need for a prophet to reveal God to him
 - b) A priest to represent him before God
 - c) A king who would rule for God
- 2) The spiritual confusion:
 - a) This was evidenced in the city of Ephesus which had one major goddess, namely Diana, or like Ephesus which had some 30,000 gods and goddesses. Rome had thousands of gods and goddesses and man lived like animals just like those which he worshipped. They had religion to the full but it was a world of spiritual night which led ultimately to eternal darkness.
- 3) The moral declension:
 - a) What can be said about the festering sensuality that characterize society. When one considers the wickedness of Nero; the moral corruption of Caligula; the open displays of lust; the contriving backbiting of treachery amongst those who were the elite; life was counted as nothing and listed on bloodbaths in the Colosseum for the excitement of men; and injustice ruled in the courts.
- 4) The hunger for decency and justice:

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- a) In this world of darkness there were those who had a God consciousness and thought with deep thinking asking the question, “How can things be changed, lives changed and man to have a true moral compass? With diligence they sought the making of themselves better through self-discipline; self-flogging; the pursuit of secret knowledge; and even being spiritual ascetically, but it always ended in utter failure. Man's sought to change through enlightenment thinking that evolution would ultimately help him become a better person morally but all ended in failure. There were longings and searching as a man sought for something better. He knew not what and despite everything he tried, it led to a world of spiritual night and eternal darkness.
- 5) The spiritual hunger of the few:
- a) There were those who, of the ancient Jewish people, still believed God, and there would come a Messiah. Just as we wait so did they, thinking perhaps today. However, days turned to weeks, weeks to years, years to long centuries, and for some 4 millennia God was silent. Not once in 400 years had God ever sent one prophet! It seemed as if the promises were cancelled. Man longed for life's purpose and still darkness ruled.

The Great Change

- 1) Then one night, how applicable, as shepherds watched their flocks, suddenly a great light shone about them. In that darkness a solitary angel of the Lord appeared and said:
“Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger” (Lk. 2:10-12)

Then a whole host of heavenly beings appeared praising God and saying:
“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Lk. 2:14)
- 2) Christ had come! God had come down to earth!
 - a) The Light of man had entered into this world (Jn. 1:9)
- 3) Against that background we come to the gospels filled with the beautiful message, and worthy to be shouted from every mountain top:
 - a) Christ is all man needs to meet his deepest needs. He is the supreme:
 - i) Prophet - revealing God to him (Jn. 1:18)
 - ii) Priest - representing Him to God (Heb. 7:25)
 - iii) King - who now, ideally rules in our hearts for God, and in a future day to be the great King over all the earth. (Isa. 6:3)
 - b) He alone can provide salvation and satisfaction. (Acts 4:12)
- 4) Light had come into the world for:
 - a) The light of the world is Jesus (Jn. 8:12) and to all who leave the darkness of man's religion of reaching up to God by their works, and trusting Him for salvation are, “translated out of the Kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col. 1:13), and made “children of the light” (Jn. 12:36; Eph. 5:8; 1 Thess. 5:5).
 - b) As we consider the blessing of living in this dispensation, knowing that the light has come and that we have been made children of the light, is it any wonder we can stop and sing, “Redeemed how I love to proclaim it”, and “Hallelujah, what a Saviour”.

May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.

John 16:13

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