

"A morning without clouds."

2 Samuel 23: 4

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The immediate response of the "watchman" to the question "What of the night?" is "the morning cometh" (Isaiah 21: 11, 12). As the long, dark night of our Lord's absence still continues what positive joy is ours as we await "the morning," a word found on the first and last pages of Scripture.

It is evident that the blessed God had the morning in mind from the outset of creation, each day of which was determined by "evening and morning." He "planted a garden *eastward* in Eden" — thus before the dark night of sin came in the *day* was in view. The beautiful inspired heading of Psalm 22 indicates that before the awful darkness of abandonment enshrouded the Saviour the light of another day was in His heart — "To the chief Musician upon Aijeleth Shahar" ("The hind of the morning" — margin).

There are many references in the Old Testament to the morning, and as we look into them we cannot fail to see the importance of these typical Scriptures to us in our day. The night of Egypt's bondage ended "when the morning appeared" (Exodus 14: 27). The utter overthrow of Dagon's power was apparent in the "morning" (1 Samuel 5: 4). The complete defeat of the Assyrian host was seen "in the morning" (2 Kings 19: 35). How blessedly the Lord Jesus in John chapter 16 speaks to His own of the joy which would be theirs in that wonderful resurrection morning, when their sorrow should be turned into joy! Thus the joy of victory "cometh in the morning."

In Exodus there are also many references to the morning. "In the morning . . . ye shall see the glory of the Lord." This was the answer to the murmuring of the people. The manna too was to be gathered in the morning, the evidence of God's provision for His people day by day, as we read elsewhere, "His compassions fail not. They are new every morning" (Lamentations 3: 22, 23).

In Leviticus 6: 9 we read that the burnt offering is to be "upon the altar all night unto the morning." Thus the fragrance of Christ's devotion to the will of God fills the present night of His rejection and persists until the morning comes.

From early days saints moving in the will of God have appreciated the importance of the morning. The outstanding incident of Abraham rising "up early in the morning" (Genesis 22) is well known to us. Moses was instructed of God to "rise up early in the morning;" Joshua — the man who led Israel to victory — is said four times to have risen "early in the morning." David, too, when sent by his father to the scene of conflict, "rose up early in the morning;" and in New Testament days Mary Magdalene and her companions came to the tomb "very early in the morning" (Mark 16: 2). This surely has a voice to all who through grace treasure the interests of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Scripture at the head of this paper speaks of a morning which is unique — a morning *without a cloud*, and evidently has a *person* in view. Has the world yet seen a morning *without a cloud*? In Job 38 we read of the "morning stars" rejoicing over the creation — a most wonderful moment, but even before man appeared on the scene we see clouds marring the brightness of that morning (cf. Isaiah 14; Ezekiel 28). Man by his disobedience and his readiness to listen to the serpent brought in a further cloud of sin, and the glory of the Creator was forgotten in the worship of the creature (Romans 1).

We have referred to the morning of Israel's deliverance from Egypt and its bondage, but how

soon the song of triumph was changed to murmurings! Thus were the eyes of God's earthly people "darkened" under the clouds of unbelief (cf. Romans 11: 8).

In the gospels we are introduced to another morning, the glory of which outshone all that had preceded it — that wonderful moment when Christ was born into the world. Zacharias speaks of "the dayspring (sunrising) from on high . . . to give light to them that sit in darkness;" Simeon, having the Child in his arms, speaks of "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel." The shepherds rejoiced; "a multitude of the heavenly host" praised God; the "wise men from the east" came to worship Him who was "born King of the Jews." "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men." Thus the light of the incarnation broke upon this scene — a blessed Man here freighted with the love and light of heaven, His every word and deed expressing the disposition of God towards man. Surely men would gladly hail the incoming of such a day! But we read "And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." The clouds of unbelief, of enmity and of rejection followed the pathway of Jesus, and that pathway of holy perfection led to the shadow and darkness of the Cross. The heavens, radiant with light and praise in the morning of that precious pathway, were shrouded in silent darkness at its close.

But another morning was to dawn — the "first day of the week" — a day when, the darkness having past, Mary Magdalene "seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre." The "glory of the Father" had visited the darkness of the grave, and that "glorious resurrection morn" had dawned. The mists surrounding Mary were dispersed, and the eventide darkness of Emmaus was dispelled by its light as glad hearts proclaimed "the Lord is risen indeed." Is it possible that clouds could appear in such a day? Even as Mary and the other women related the happenings of that wonderful morning the clouds of unbelief appeared, "their words seemed to them (the apostles) as idle tales, *and they believed them not.*" "And they, when they had heard that He was alive . . . *believed not.*"

In Acts 2 we have the incoming of another day, often referred to as the Spirit's day, the introduction of which was marked by a wonderful demonstration of divine *power*. The believers were found "with *one* accord in *one* place;" the "wonderful works of God" were manifest; "many wonders and signs were done by the apostles" three thousand souls were blessed in one day, and the work continued as the believers gathered "with one accord," "breaking bread," "praising God, and having favour with all the people. and the Lord added to the church *daily.*" Men and women, filled with the Holy Spirit, marked by "great grace" and "great power" triumphed in the Name of Jesus, and in the truth of His exaltation at the right hand of God in heaven. Religious leaders and the councils of men were non-plussed; personal gain was set aside, and the apostles "taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead." How brilliant was the commencement of that day! Sadly we read in Acts 5 — "But;" and again in Acts 6 — "there arose a murmuring." Thus the clouds of self-seeking, of deceit and of dissatisfaction came in — and it was not "a morning without a cloud."

Finally we have the service of the apostle Paul, to whom was committed the special truth which has illumined this day in which we live. Speaking to the Ephesian elders he said, "Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind . . . for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." That which had been in the heart of God from before the foundation of the world, His thoughts of blessing and of glory, was now declared in all its fulness. The truth of Christ and His church, her nearness to Himself, and His coming again to receive her to Himself, all set before the believers for their present joy in the power of the Spirit of God. The "good pleasure of His (God's) will;" "the mystery of His will;" "the counsel of His will;" "the riches of His glory," are some of the choice truths brought to us through the ministry of the apostle, enjoyment of which should surely produce a spirit of worship and

affectionate response to the One in whom all is centred, our Lord Jesus Christ, the theme of Paul's ministry. Yet again the clouds gather — "all they which are in Asia be turned away from me" says Paul, and John in writing to these Ephesian saints has to say — "Thou hast left thy first love."

On the last page of Scripture we hear the Lord Jesus saying "I am the . . . bright and morning star." The actual word used in this verse for "morning" does not appear to have been used previously. It would speak of something outstandingly brilliant, and as seeing the "morning star" personified in Christ we at last reach that which knows no cloud, for the glory of that blessed Person shines unaltered and undimmed; His perfections will be the unsullied light of an eternal day.

As we reach the close of another year in the history of a world where Christ is rejected and unsought may the glory of the One who will lighten the day of God be enshrined in our hearts, and may we be increasingly found walking here as those who "love His appearing."