

THE HOUR OF DARKNESS

Luke 22: 52, 53 - *"Then said Jesus unto the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders, which were come to him, be come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves? When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and the hour of darkness."*

Light is one of the finest gifts of God. It is impossible to imagine our world without light. When God created the world he did not wait very long before he made the light, because on the first day of creation God said, "let there be light." The Apostle James calls God the "Father of lights." He is the 'father' of light in the sense of originator or author or creator of it. In the beginning God not only made light and the laws of light, but also made light giving bodies - the sun, moon, stars, planets, etc. All light has its source in God, the "Father of lights." since light is such a wonderful gift of God, it does not seem strange to us that the Bible uses "light" as a symbol or picture of all that is good and pure and beautiful: and darkness is used in the same Scriptures as a symbol of evil and wickedness. Jesus used "darkness" and our text in that sense also. We use language that way in our everyday life and conversation.

This Lenten season we are considering the general theme "the solemn hours of Lent." Tonight in our text Jesus says, as the Jews come to arrest him and lead him to his death, "this is your hour of darkness."

I. THE PRINCE OF DARKNESS

The devil, the prince of darkness, was once a holy angel, a creature of light. He beheld God in all his glory, and for a time, at least, saw the "Father of lights." After creation, God so everything that he had made, and it was very good. So the devil was once a good angel. Jesus tells us, "the devil was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth" (John 8:44). These words clearly teach that the devil was "in the truth," but that he did not remain in the truth. Some great, mysterious catastrophe happened in heaven to cause not only the devil, but an untold number of other Angels to fall into sin.

What did they do? How could holy angels sin? Why would they want to do such a thing? The Bible is silent on this matter. But the devil himself, by his actions and words, reveals himself to us and makes it quite clear what caused his downfall. "Ye shall be as gods," he told Eve. "all these things will I give the if thou wilt fall down and worship me," he told Jesus when he tempted him in the wilderness (MATT 4:9). Aha Satan! So that was your trouble; you wanted to be God. You could not bear to see God as the ruler over all things. You talked thousands of other angels into sinning with you. You wanted to be God, and you still want to be God. We shall remember that. We can better understand you, and be warned of your tricks and temptations.

Ever since the devil was cast out of heaven, he has been trying to destroy God's work and creation. With all the subtlety at his command, he came into the Garden of Eden and caused man to become darkened and benighted. In that very Garden of Eden God told the devil that the Savior would come and crush his head and restore what Satan had destroyed. The old serpent never forgot that promise and threat of God.

He recognized Jesus when He came into the world. He also knew why Jesus had come into the world. "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?", was the complaint of the devils (MATT 8:29). Satan knew that Jesus was the "seed of the woman" who was to crush his head. The devil clearly saw the challenge, and accepted it.

Here is the motivating force and power behind all the agents of Christ's Passion. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "this is your hour, and the hour of darkness." The fierce power and might of the Prince of Darkness was assembled for a final and vicious assault on the Prince of Light, the Son of God. Let us see how Satan carried out his attack.

He entered into the heart of Judas and persuaded him to betray Jesus. He caused Peter to deny the Lord. The devil so stirred up the elders and rulers of the Jews that they could not see or hear aright any more. "We must have his blood. He must die. Let him be crucified," they raved. Satan may have whispered something like this in Pilate's ear, "why risk your own security for the sake of this Jew? You declared him innocent. Let them take the blame. Let them settle their own religious quarrels. Wash your hands, and you are conscious is clear." We can imagine the Prince of Darkness telling the soldiers, "Go on, have some fun with him, give him another slap, jam those thorns down into his scalp." To the Jewish people Satan may have suggested these thoughts, "There is nothing to worry about. If Pilate does not want to take responsibility for his blood, you be responsible. Go ahead, be bold; blame yourself and your children. Nothing can come of it anyway." The people that passed by the cross were, no doubt, urged by the devil to revile, mock, laugh at Jesus, and make sport of Him.

This was the hour, the hour of darkness, and the devil made the most of it. How happy, in his own perverted way, the Evil Spirit must have been when Christ died! the devil could hardly believe his eyes. "God's Son dead? Impossible! Yet, there He is. Did I really win? Is He out of existence now, the seed of the woman who was going to crush my head? I showed Him who is master!" These may have been his thoughts in the hour of darkness.

We call the devil a mad spirit. Why? Oh, he is clever and wily and intelligent. But he has so perverted his whole mind and heart that he is often blinded by his own hatred. Satan is a fool in spite of all his dark schemes and plans. By his hour of darkness he ruined his own power and might, for it was through the sufferings and death of Jesus that the power of Satan was forever destroyed. Satan ruined his own kingdom by helping to have Christ killed. The Prince of Darkness meant it all for a terrible evil; God turned even this evil to a great good. Thereby he saved the world from sin, death, and the power of the devil. Truly, he is a mad spirit to fight against God. How could he ever hope to succeed?

The Old Serpent will be confined to the eternal darkness of hell at the end of the world. But do not feel sorry for him. He prefers to be in hell forever to being with God in heaven. Surely, he is crazed with hatred. This fallen spirit, who was the cause of Christ's sufferings and death, and who is the source of all evil in the world, this black angel will end up in eternal darkness.

Fiends, do you take the devil seriously? Do you really believe he is a person, a mad spirit? Do you really consider him your greatest enemy? Do the words of Peter mean something to you, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour"? (1 Peter 5:8) Would you really want to have the devil as your master? It is to be feared that we take this matter lightly. We should beware, lest Satan trick us and cause us to fall in these latter days. He seems to work hardest on those who are believers in Christ. The others he has in the palm of his hand. So he does not seem to be much concerned with them. He tries to wreak havoc especially in the churches. Satan can only be overcome by prayer and the Word of God, as Jesus indicated when he told His disciples, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

"This is your hour, and the power of darkness." Jesus was referring to the work of the devil, the Prince of Darkness. But as we study these words of Jesus spoken in Gethsemane, we are not only interested in the power of darkness and the Prince of Darkness, we are above all else interested in our Savior, who is the Prince of Light. Let us learn about Him now.

II. The Prince of Light

St. John says of Jesus, "In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not" (John 1:4,5). Since Jesus is the only begotten Son of the "Father of lights," He must be as the Nicene Creed says of Him, "God of God, Light of Light." The Son dwelt in a glory and light with the Father and the Holy Ghost that none can comprehend. On the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus permitted a little of His glory to shine through His human body. St. Matthew tells us: "His face did shine as the sun."

This Prince of Light came into a world of darkened minds and souls. What happened when He came? "The darkness comprehended not the light." Most people misunderstood Jesus. Few could grasp the purpose and significance of His coming into the world. His words and actions were usually misunderstood by His contemporaries. When He healed a man on the Sabbath Day by merely speaking a few words to the man, then the elders and priests tried to prove that He was not from God, because He broke the Third Commandment by working on the Sabbath. When Jesus cast out devils, He was accused of having done this miracle by the power of the Prince of Darkness. When He tried to save the lowest sinners, the publicans and harlots, they intimated to Him that "birds of a feather flock together." After He raised Lazarus from the dead, the Jews wanted to kill Lazarus again, because too many people were beginning to accept Jesus as the promised Savior. Even the disciples misunderstood the purpose of the Lord's coming, for they asked Him on the day of Ascension, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom of Israel?" We see from this question that the disciples thought Jesus had come to restore political independence and self-rule to the Jewish nation. Truly, the Prince of Darkness had so darkened the minds and souls of men that they would hardly comprehend the Prince of Light when He came into the world.

Think of Jesus in Gethsemane praying. Outwardly everything is peaceful, the big city of Jerusalem is asleep, the moon is perhaps shining, the stars are out. But a terrible storm is brewing in the dark minds of men. The Prince of Darkness is gathering all the forces at his command to wipe out the Prince of Light. In the distance we can see lights bobbing and moving. They come closer. Judas steps forward and kisses Jesus, and then the whole mob moves into view. It is at this moment Jesus spoke the words of our text, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness." In other words, Jesus is going to submit to all the powers of darkness because it is the will of God, His Father.

The whole trial of our Lord was conducted by the same darkened minds which we have already noted. Throughout the trial we see Jesus, the Light of the World, surrounded by blackness and evil. Everything our Lord says and does is perfect and holy; everything His enemies say and do is terrible and evil.

We see this again on Calvary. The three hours of darkness were sent by God. Was that not a true picture of the state of the world into which Christ came? "There was a darkness over all the earth." The Prince of Light was indeed surrounded by the powers of the Prince of Darkness. Are not those three hours of darkness also symbolic of the darkest depths of hell which Christ suffered on the cross in our stead? When he cried out, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He was really suffering the torments of a blackest hell. Only the damned know what it means to be really forsaken of God. Little wonder that our Lord calls it "the our and power of darkness." The Prince of Light sinking into the blackest darkness!

Time went on and the hour of darkness had to pass away, and it did. When Jesus descended into hell after His sufferings, He proclaimed that He had crushed the Devil's head as had been foretold so long ago. Out of the hour of darkness came the brightest and most wonderful light. The Lord told His disciples to go into all the world and tell everyone that He is the "The light of the world." They should preach to all creatures the good news that he suffered and died and rose again from the dead, and thereby paid for all the sins of the world. Who ever believes that good news will be saved and go to heaven. Whoever believes that the Prince of Light submitted Himself to the power of darkness for art redemption - that person will surely be eternally in light.

God is the "Father of Lights." Jesus is the "Light of the world." We pray, "Holy Ghost with light divine, shine within this heart of mine." The holy Trinity is not only light, but also dwells in light, and He wants us to dwell with Him in His eternal light and glory.

We should be very, very thankful to Jesus that he did all this for us. We all should saying in the words of the well-known Lenten hymn, "Thou didst choose to be tormented that might doom should be prevented. Thousand common thousand banks shall be, Dearest Jesus unto thee." Oh, the wonder of our Savior's love! He submitted Himself to the power and the hour of darkness that we might have glory and an eternity of light. Amen.

The Prayer

O Faithful God, I thank Thee that Thou didst take me out of darkness into Thy blessed light. In my infancy Thou didst translate me from Satan's kingdom of darkness into Thy wonderful kingdom of light through my holy baptism. Thou hast kept me in Thy grace until this present moment.

O Lord, Thou didst overcome the Prints of Darkness and didst break his power. Let not the evil Foe destroy my soul. Let Thy holy angels be my guardians by night and by day. Send me Thy Holy Spirit with light divine to shine upon this heart of mine.

Again we humble ourselves, oh God and acknowledge all our transgressions before Thee. We hope for mercy and forgiveness only because the Prince of Light has redeemed us with His sufferings and death on the cross. Hear us, oh Lord, for the sake of Thy dear Son, our precious Savior. Amen.