

~Other Speakers G-L: Raymond Golsworthy:

“I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places.” Isaiah 45:3
 “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.” 1 Pet. 4:12
 “The people which sat in darkness saw great light.” Matt. 4:16

To most of us, the very word darkness is by no means pleasant. It makes us think of sin and evil, violence and crime, and all those other deeds of the night. Mercifully, that will not be the area of our thinking in the meditation we now approach. Rather shall we be considering what we call the dark times of life; those times of trial and testing which are common to us all; times when we are visited with sickness or bereavement. Or it could be some disappointment or difficulty we had hoped to avoid. All of us have those experiences, and, not least, the dedicated Christians! God certainly has His good reasons for allowing this, and, in fact, He has positively ordained that those be the times when believers may find His treasures, treasures that will make them rich, and able to enrich others. It is such a help and blessing when we really see this!

It is well known that most of earth’s treasures are found in dark places; our gold and silver, our diamonds and other jewels, so it should not surprise us that dark times should be the times when we may gather spiritual treasures, and become rich indeed!

Much, we know, has been written about suffering and trial, and it is not our purpose, now, to add anything to that. We intend just to look at a few Bible verses where the word darkness (and its equivalent) is linked with some kind of treasure, which may become ours at our dark times. Let us note, with thanksgiving, what those treasures are, and let us gather up those treasures. First, thank God, there is the treasure of “

A NEW SONG

Our Bibles tell us that “God gives songs in the night” (Job 35:10). The same assurance is found in Isaiah, where the prophet goes on to tell us the kind of songs God will give us. He says God’s people shall have a song “as in the night when a solemn assembly is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to the mountain of the Lord”. The prophet is referring to those annual feast-times when God’s people would travel up to Jerusalem to meet with the Lord together. Those songs would be the Psalms the happy pilgrims would sing around their camp-fires while on their journey, or when they were encamped around the sacred city on those occasions. Their songs in the night would, indeed, be like the flames of their fires, leaping up through the darkness and into the waiting heart of God. Happy songs, indeed, but, as the prophet says, “songs in the night” (see Isaiah 30:29).

Songs for the Lord; the enemy fears

All Christians need to realise that all praises sung to the Lord in the Spirit have an extra-terrestrial and executive effect. This is taught in Psalm 149, for instance, where we are told that where God’s people are praising, they have both a song in the mouth and a sword in the hand (verse 6), and that they are executing God’s judgments on the heathen, and “binding their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron”. The Psalm closes with the statement: “This honour have all the saints”, and then he adds his own “Hallelujah” (in Hebrew). Today we can link those verses with what the New Testament teaches about “principalities and powers in high places” (Eph. 6:12 for instance, and Matt. 18:18, 19). We may rightly say that, as our songs go up to God, our sword is piercing, wounding the heart of Satan.

A clear illustration would be the story of Job, where the whole message revolves around the events of chapter one. Satan is portrayed as in dialogue with God, and he has the temerity to suggest that Job only revered God because of the things he had received from God, and not because of any appreciation of God Himself. In response, God gave Satan permission to strip Job of everything he had, and then see if he would still worship Him. The awful stripping was carried out, and Job was left destitute and in untold agony. Yet, in his indescribable darkness, he still cried out, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the Name of the LORD”. Oh, what a victory was that, what a sword-thrust! Job’s was a song in the darkest night, but a song given by God, and a song that had “power over all the power of the enemy” (Luke 10:19). How Satan must have trembled, and how he would have felt those binding chains! What a song that was, sung by one single suffering saint in the very darkest of nights. It was a song given by God, and a treasure indeed.

In the case of Paul and Silas, it was a duet, heartily sung in a dark prison, and when it seemed that God’s

leading had only landed them in deep trial. But God gave the song, and another stronghold of hell collapsed. The first church in Europe was soon singing the Saviour's praises, and more chains were on the enemy!

We may be assured that whenever such darkness is falling, God's corresponding songs are falling too, and are somewhere in the shadows. A bleeding Paul and Silas were able to find them and sing them back to the God who gave them. They had found hidden treasures!

We referred, earlier, to those feast-times when all Israel representatively would have been heard singing their praises in the darkness of the night (Isaiah 30:29). Our comment, now, is that if the praises of one saint (as Job), or perhaps two (as Paul and Silas) had the power to shame Satan, and the hoards of hell, what is it when, as churches, we can sing out, in the Spirit, the true praises of God! For ourselves, we believe that songful worship of that kind, is a vital part of the church's ministry. The Psalm about the sword and the chains begins with: "Sing unto the LORD a new song, and His praise in the congregation of saints" (Psalm 149:1). And, if they are suffering churches how much greater again the impact! God gives this treasure to churches also. But it is not just a matter of music and words; it is a matter of knowing God and His Christ from deep and dark experience. How right, indeed, was our sister Sabine Baring-Gould, and how on target her well-known song "Onward Christian Soldiers", particularly when she wrote:

At the Name of Jesus Satan's host doth flee;
On then, Christian soldiers, On to victory!
Hell's foundations quiver, at the shout of praise;
Brothers, lift your voices, Loud the anthem raise.

We say again that few of us have realised the Satan-destroying power behind the songs of the Christian, and the songs of the church, particularly when they rise from a background of suffering. Those are given songs (Job 35:10), and they are the treasures of darkness. We believe they will be heard again, to the great glory of the Lord, and to the final undoing of Satan's kingdom (See Rom. 16:20). Lord, teach us to sing, in the dark!

Songs of faith

These new songs are songs of faith, for the singer is still in the darkness. They reach the unseen realm and have power over Satan and his hosts.

I well remember an occasion when a young friend of mine came under terrible attack. Previously he was a great joy to me personally and a valued helper in God's work. Suddenly he became spiritually dull; he had no more interest in the gospel. Friends brought him to me, hoping that our strong personal link might reawaken him. I kindly welcomed him, but the ensuing conversation did not seem to mean much to him. I held his hand and prayed, pleading the mighty name of Jesus and the great victory of Calvary, but still there was no change. God had something to teach me. Suddenly I knew what to do, in this case. God clearly said to me, "Make him sing," and He told me what to sing! (He knows and loves our songbooks!) I said: "Bill, you've got to sing; you and I will sing the praises of the Lord together and we'll sing 'Jesus shall reign where'er the sun'; let us stand side by side and sing loudly." Bill was not very willing to sing, but, anyway, I stood up and sang out the first line as loudly as I could and Bill started to smile and, standing up beside me, he joined in. He had a magnificent voice, and sang, with all stops pulled out:

Blessings abound where'er He reigns:
The prisoner leaps to loose his chains,
The weary find eternal rest,
And all the sons of want are blest.

Where He displays His healing power
Death and the curse are known no more;
In Him the tribes of Adam boast
More blessings than their father lost.

Instantly, his depression was gone, and it never returned. He again became our strong and winsome helper in the work we were doing and later had his heart's desire: off to New Guinea to spread the gospel and tell out what he had learned of Christ! He had found his treasure of darkness, his song in the night!

But remember, there is never a universal technique. We must be in the Spirit and follow Him in His leading for each case.

Songs of thanksgiving

There are also songs of thanksgiving (See Psalm 107). This Psalm portrays five kinds of darkness in which people cried to God and were heard. There was:

The darkness of the wearied traveller (4, 5) The darkness of the chained prisoner (10, 14, 16) The darkness of the dying invalid (18) The darkness of the storm-tossed mariner (26, 27) The darkness of the hungry farmer (33, 34).

Each of these cried to the Lord and was rescued, the Psalmist cries: "Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness" (8, 15, 21, 31). Each of the different kinds of darkness we have described has its own spiritual counterpart. Which category are you in? (Place a tick if possible.) Have you cried to the Lord, and been answered?

Are you praising today? There is a Satan-subduing power in these songs also. (See 2 Chron. 20:22; Exodus 15:1, 21; the songs which Moses and the children of Israel, and Miriam sang after the Red Sea miracle and with the darkness of Egypt behind them.) "Come, let us sing unto the Lord," songs of faith and songs of thanksgiving.

The next treasure we would like to mention is the treasure of

A NEW AND DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF SPIRITUAL THINGS

We are thinking now of verses like Psalm 16:7: "My reins instruct me in the night seasons." The English wording is a little unusual in that verse, but the Psalmist is referring to what we would call something deep down inside. The verse could accurately be rendered: "I will bless the Lord who hath given me counsel; something deep inside me instructs me in the night seasons." The New Testament counterpart of this is doubtless "the wonderful teachings of the Holy Spirit" (See John 14:26; 1 John 2:27), but for the present, we are just concentrating on the occasions or seasons when this new kind of understanding comes to us. David evidently found that in his case, his instruction and his counsels came to him in what he calls the night seasons and it came from somewhere deep inside him. It was then that he received this treasure of the darkness.

All this, we feel sure, can be translated into terms of spiritual darkness, or circumstantial darkness, or what we call the dark times of life. It is then, particularly, that something deep inside us will teach us this new kind of wisdom and new light will shine within us. As it was with David, so will it be with us!

It is interesting to note that James, in his epistle, contrasts two kinds of wisdom, an earthly wisdom that does not come down from heaven, and a wisdom that does come down from heaven (Jas. 3:16, 17). And, according to David, like the dew (Hos. 14:5), it came down in the night and brought its heavenly refreshing. It was one of those treasures of darkness which God has promised. And it can be ours too, at such times!

The Dayspring from on High

Our thoughts are being carried now to that miracle-promise of Zacharias, (the dumb made to speak!), as recorded in Luke 1:79 and relative to that first humble coming of the Saviour. The godly old man said: "The Dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death." The historical miracle took place soon afterwards in the little town of Bethlehem and there, in the manger, lay our great "Dayspring from on high", coming to lighten our darkness, and guide our feet into the way of peace. Perhaps Zacharias was thinking mainly of a dark Israel, or a whole dark world, but the tried and tested believer can claim it today: the Dayspring is here, and here to give us a new insight into heavenly things, and to do it when we have been sitting in darkness!

The experience of a younger friend of ours could perhaps be quoted here, just as an example of what we have been saying. Emerging from a prison camp in Japan, he told us that Psalm 119:71 was the verse that summed up those 3 dark years for him: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy precepts." He was one who had sat in darkness indeed. Just a wild young British sailor, plucked from the ocean beside his burning ship, he was brought to our prison ship and shortly afterwards converted. He eagerly joined in with our little Bible-group, and a great light quickly entered into him. Quite apart from us, he became an unusual lover of God's Word and thereafter spent his life spreading the gospel and sharing with others what he had learned in the school of Christ. His reins instructed him in night season in Japan. And I can say it was the same with us all. Two or three of us had had the privilege of attending good Bible Schools prior to our capture, but we all felt that we learned more in the Japanese prison camp than ever before. Extra light shines in the darkness!

Night schools

We believe it could be truly said, and with all due reverence, that God's schools are mostly night schools. While He Himself is more than willing to teach us at all times, it seems that His scholars learn more quickly in their night-times than they do when the sun is shining on them. Perhaps those bright lights of day tend to distract their attention, and they find it more difficult to concentrate than when the lights are dimmed, or deliberately put out. But God knows best what to do. He is skilful in His own business, and we have to say, as we read in Job: "Who teacheth like Him?" (Job 36:22).

Far be it from us, however, to minimise in any way the sheer greatness of the things that God would teach us. It is not just a matter of learning patience or perseverance, or even humility, (which, themselves, are not brief studies!), but there are those vast objective unveilings and insights which God longs to give to His people. These go far beyond the bounds of theology, or Bible-knowledge; these are heavenly things; they are areas that can only be entered with heavenly keys; keys which God Himself will kindly give us (Matt. 7:7). They are all immense things, but the mystery is that "things which are hidden from the wise and prudent are revealed unto babes" (Matt. 11:25). And we would add that, just that single fact itself takes a lot of learning (for the proud He knoweth afar off!). It is better, and quicker, if we enter God's school, "knowing nothing, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2).

But we say again that the lessons, and the truths, that can be learned in God's school are immense, beyond all telling. Think of the greatness of personally knowing God and being able to speak face to face with Him (Exodus 33:11). And then, there is the matter of having, at least some grasp of God's eternal purpose in Christ! The Lord Jesus told His disciples that it was actually given to them to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven (see Matt. 13:11). (In the New Testament, a mystery is a mercifully uncovered secret that has at last been brought out into the open, like those toys hidden in the cupboard for weeks, and then brought out on Christmas morning!). It has been given to the disciples to know mysteries of the Kingdom, the reign and rulership of God! What a mystery, at last disclosed to Christ's learners.

Paul spoke of what he called the mystery, "Christ among you" (Col. 1:27, margin), and he said it was a rich and glorious mystery. He means the very life of Christ, risen, exalted, reigning and then dispensed to, and shared by, His people, making them one throbbing organism with Himself; i.e. the mystery of the living church! What a mystery, now disclosed to God's learners, and for their consistent application and implementation.

We shall not attempt, here, to say any more about that marvel of marvels, but such are the things which God wants to plant in the hearts of His blood-bought people. What a field of spiritual knowledge, and what a curriculum God has in His school!

Spiritual revelation

Christ even said that He had made known to His pupils, "All things that He Himself had heard from His Father" (John 15:15; see also ch. 16:15). These things are now made knowable to us all, but I fear very few of us (including myself!) have gone very far in grasping and exploring such things. We are like those prejudiced and ceremonial-bound Hebrews, who, at the time when they ought to be teachers of God's people, were still in the kindergarten, learning their spiritual ABC (first principles)! They were babes, still needing milk, when they ought to be enjoying strong meat (Heb. 5:12, also see 1 Cor. 3:1, 2). We must not labour this point, but we do want to make plain how vast is the field of the things that God wants us to know. It is like looking up into the skies on a starry night. What a school book (Psalm 19:1-3) "published in all languages!"

The Bible does tell us that: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard" the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (see 1 Cor. 2:9). That verse, however, is followed by another verse, which says: "But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit." In other words, the sun is already shining, but we are still asleep, or have deliberately closed our shutters against the shining light! Never read verse 9 without reading verse 10 also. Dimness may mean that we, too, are still ceremonial-bound, like those Hebrews were. The only difference is that ours are so-called Christian ceremonies! Needless to say, we cannot know all, but, through prayer and God's gracious help, we can make a good start. Our eyes could begin to see, and our ears to hear.

We must say again, however, that it must be spiritual revelation and not just mental information. And, coming back to our present particular point, all this is best discovered in times of trial and testing. Those lights do shine in our nights; they prepare us for that day when, "We shall know as we are known" (1 Cor. 13:12). All praise to the Lord!

Put out the lights

There is a simple anecdote from our own experience which concerns a young friend who had made quite a mark in the field of photography and who specialised in "still life", and most of all delicately coloured flowers. When he would visit us, he would always bring along his little box containing slides of his most recent work. He would set up his projector and screen, and when all was ready, he would call us in and, after a little explanation of what was coming, he would invariably say: "Put out the lights", whereupon we, too, were sitting in darkness. And then the show was on! And, what a show it always was. There were beautiful flowers of the most delicate shades, viewed from all angles and in varying lights. It is no exaggeration to say that we were all left spellbound at what we had seen and we wanted to worship the glorious Maker of it all.

I think the point of our little story is already clear to all, especially that word of command: "Put out the lights". Had the lights stayed on (some of the lights being very attractive in themselves), all that beauty and understanding would have eluded us, and most importantly, that new impulse to worship! It was in our darkness that we really saw.

None of us, then, should think it strange when we find ourselves passing through some kind of darkness, or experiencing fiery trials. It is nothing strange that has come to us (see 1 Pet. 4:12). In fact, we would say that it is more strange if they had not come. Rather, we should expect them and exploit them, and gather up the associated spiritual treasure.

Star-gazing

There can be new understandings when we are brought low, and sit in deep darkness (see Psalm 16:7; Psalm 119:71).

I was once told by an Indian farmer that it is possible to see the stars (some of them) in the middle of a bright day. But, he added, the place to do so is at the bottom of a deep well. As you descend, the well-top will appear to be getting smaller and smaller, but you must go down still further, till everything around is totally dark. Then, as you look up, and through the tiny hole of light, "you can actually see the stars," he said, "like little jewels in the sky". He tried to explain that all the side lights were eliminated; and the skyward vision was totally unhindered, "and then you can see the stars," he added. Whether he was scientifically correct, or not, I do not know (I was never inclined to try it), but, for our present purposes that does not matter. Right or wrong, there was a lot of spiritual truth behind what this old man said. We must let the Lord take us down into some kind of darkness if we are to know the wonders of His heavenly things. That, certainly, is true! May the Lord have His own way with us all in these matters!

In my early days I attended a schoolboy's Bible Class where they always sang the same CSSM chorus before the prescribed Scripture reading: "Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous, wondrous things out of Thy law" (a song according to Psalm 119:18). Today "after 75 years!" I realise that that is what the Lord has been graciously doing every day of my life, and I still feel I am only beginning!

There is a very similar verse where the Psalmist expressed a similar longing; this time to, "Dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of his life, to behold the beauty of the LORD" (Psalm 27:4). I think I can say that that, too, is what the Lord has been doing, and I know that I have seen a little, but I fear it is only a glimpse. There are two different Hebrew words for "behold" in the two Psalms. The one in Psalm 27, about beholding the beauty of the Lord, is the Hebrew word "chazah", the same word used in Isaiah 47: 13 for "star-gazers". That is exactly what it is when we behold the beauty of the Lord; we are just star-gazing! He is so indescribably splendid and awesome! Hallelujah.

Oh Lord, let us behold more of the wondrous things of Thy Word, and still more of thine own beauty. Bring us also into Thy house (1 Cor. 3:16).

A NEW ENCOUNTER WITH HIM AND A FRESH KNOWING OF HIM

We would like to say something, now, about a third spiritual treasure that may be ours in our times of trial and testing. (There are countless others, no doubt, but these are the three that have been laid on our hearts for this particular meditation.) The treasure that we now have in mind is, without doubt, the greatest treasure of them all, our blessed Lord Himself; He is the "pearl of greatest price".

That, surely, is a great heavenly treasure; a new meeting with our blessed Lord, and a new enhanced knowing of Him. That, thank God, can be the experience of the Christian at any time; our seasons of sunlight, as well as those seasons of darkness of which we have been speaking. Certainly, the Word of God is not bound, nor is His

will, and nor are His timings, but, as far as we can see, Scripture seems to indicate the latter as the more likely season, our times of darkness and special suffering

A Light in the darkness

We note that the Psalmist said, "Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness: He is gracious and full of compassion" (Psalm 112:4). Also, the old priest Zacharias, prophesying of, as we have mentioned, the very soon coming Christ, said He was about to come as One who would be "a light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death" (Luke 1:79). No doubt, the aged seer was thinking of many kinds of darkness, national and otherwise, but our own times of spiritual darkness may well have been included in his view. The beautiful title Zacharias gave him was "the Dayspring", surely indicating a preceding period of night. Countless are those who have found the light of salvation following the dark night of sin, but countless also are the Christians who have been granted new revelations of Christ after, and in, their times of deep trial and testing. Such indeed was the apostle John who gave us the book of Revelation. After a life of faithful service he was banished to the "isle called Patmos, for the Word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:9); a dark night indeed. But there he saw "One like unto the Son of man" (verse 13), and One Whose countenance was "as the sun shineth in his strength (unclouded brilliance)". He is depicted as being "in the midst of seven golden lampstands" (His redeemed people scattered throughout the region), but He outshines them all. They were candlesticks; He was the sun, far greater than all. Needless to say, that was a new encounter with the Lord of all, bringing John himself to a new and larger knowledge. And it came to John in his night season, reminding us of that precious prophecy of Malachi (last of the Old Testament prophets), "The sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings." Many, we say, are the Christians, too, who, in their isolation and loneliness, perhaps, have had their new encounters with the same Son of man, and He, in a new encounter, has become their Sunrise with healing in His wings. We cannot avoid mention of the next verse, telling us that those who see that sunrise will, "Go out and leap around (gambol) as calves released from the stall." What a lovely picture of the new exuberance that is the portion of all "sons of the sunrise", those who have had these fresh encounters with their risen Lord.

We should not be surprised to find our Lord in our times of darkness, for the Bible tells us that that is His dwelling place (See 1 Kings 8:12; Psalm 18:11; Psalm 97:2). That may have many meanings, but I, personally, am not averse to thinking, and claiming, that those meanings may include my times of trial and testing; my Lord and Saviour somehow lives in them. They are indeed His pavilion (see 2 Sam. 22:10-12; NB "pavilion" is in Hebrew "sukkah", meaning "booth" as in Lev. 23:42, 43). David says it is the Lord's "secret place", so, when darkness comes to us, we may be sure the Lord is there! The prophet Nahum uses another figure, and says "the clouds are the dust of His feet" (Nah. 1:3), so when I see my skies darkening, and clouds everywhere, I may be assured that my Lord is coming to me, and coming quickly! Indeed, indeed, we need not fear the darkness; Jehovah Shammah, the Lord is there! Hallelujah, we may discover a new knowledge of Him!

Jesus drew near

And was it not so with those two despondent disciples setting out for Emmaus in Luke 24. They, surely, had been in what the Bible calls "gross darkness" (Jer. 13:16; thick darkness, in the NIV), and all light would have vanished from their skies. A passing Stranger saw that they were sad, and He asked the reason. They told the Stranger that the One Whom they had believed was their Messiah had just recently been crucified, and now all kinds of strange rumours were going around about Him. It had all been to them like one dark night of sorrow and disappointment, but, as we said, that was the time when "Jesus Himself drew near" (Luke 24:15). The great risen Conqueror of all appeared to them in their night, and "turned their mourning into dancing". He also "took off their sackcloth" (Psalm 30:11), enabling them to know Him in a new way, and to see Him in a new light, the great living Lord of all. And what an invigorating revelation that was, for we read that they rose up the same hour and travelled back from Emmaus to tell their disciple friends what had happened in the way! Certainly, they had found God's treasure in their darkness, and they were rich.

We believe that that true Emmaus event was only a foreshadowing of those even greater revelations of Christ which are now available to us, and available, particularly, in our times of darkness (see Eph. 1:15-23). Such are revelations of Christ, raised, exalted and His own life thereupon graciously poured out into His church; making His people all one life with Himself. Once we see that, we shall also be invigorated, and want to go all through the world telling our revelation. And He who is the Head of the body will inevitably go with us, and be involved.

How wonderful it is that our times of darkness and testing can be the very times when Christ Himself will come to us in a new way, and show us His glory!

Probably the darkest night that Moses ever went through was when he wrestled with God after seeing his brother Aaron and the whole nation of Israel wheeling and dancing around the golden calf. Broken in his heart

he asked God to blot his name out of God's book (Ex. 32:32), but later found it in that heart to pray the prayer "seven words only! ", "beseech Thee, show me Thy glory" (Ex. 33:18). God instructed him to go back into the Mount, and when he did so, the Lord descended in the cloud, and showed him as much of Himself as Moses was able to bear. What a revelation, and given as a sunrise in Moses' darkest night.

Perhaps the most precious promise that Christ ever made, and open now to all obedient Christians was: "I will love him, and manifest Myself unto him" (John 14:21). Such Christians could be passing through their darkest night "maybe because of their obedience" but the promise still stands: an unveiling of the Lord, by the Lord. Can you think of anything more wonderful?

This knowing of Christ was something that Paul longed for above all else. In fact he said that he regarded all else as loss, an unwelcome debit. He said he counted such things as refuse (or worse) if only he could know Christ! (Phil. 3:3-10). God answered his prayer, but how dark was the night (?) of his final years! Nevertheless, he had his sunrise too.

We would see Jesus

And what of Stephen, who, in the hour of his martyrdom "looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw Jesus, standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55, 56). And later, while the stones of his martyrdom were falling on him, he called upon God and said: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He then knelt down, "And fell asleep" (Acts 7:59, 60). We may say that, right there, in that darkness, Stephen was given a sight of his Dayspring, the living and reigning Christ of God!

We may also say that, at that hour, another sun was rising. The apostle Paul was actually present and participating in that martyrdom of Stephen, and surely something deep was registering in his heart (see Acts 8:1 and Acts 22:20). One translation of the latter verse says, (and Paul himself is speaking): "I was standing by in full agreement with his murderers, and minding their clothes" (Jerusalem Bible). But, as we know, Paul had his encounter with that same Son of Man. It happened on the road to Damascus when the Great Light from Heaven shone down upon him and his murderous entourage. Paul knew it was not just a light from heaven, it was a living Person, for Paul cried: "Who art thou, Lord" (Acts 9:5). And the answer was: "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." Surely Paul learned then that Christ and His Christians are one organism, and to touch those few faithful ones in Damascus, and anywhere else, is to touch that glorious One in heaven, Whose splendour was lighting up the Damascus road. It all happened at midday, but we read that His "brightness was above the brightness of the sun." It even blinded Paul, and he had to be led by the hand into Damascus. What an encounter; the Head of the church, alive in heaven, and shining down brilliantly upon a servant-to-be! Yes, Stephen saw his living Lord in one way, and Paul in another, but it is the same great Lord. When He harvests one crop, He sows for another. He will not leave Himself without witness (Acts 14:17). But, each must gather up God's treasure and then go forth to share their gold with others.

Relative to that last point about having an encounter with Christ Himself I would particularly like to mention that that is what was given to the Lord's disciples on the night their ship was almost submerged by the terrible storm on the sea of Galilee (Matt. 14:24). It was a dark night, and they battled the storm as long as they could, but were finally exhausted. It was then that they saw Jesus walking on the sea, and coming towards them. At first, this increased their fear, because they thought it was a spirit. Probably some of His eternal glory was shining through, but He put their hearts at rest and was soon in the ship with them. Our point, however, is that that was a new revelation to them of the identity, and other-worldly splendour of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was only partial, but greatly significant: "they thought they saw a spirit". Previously they had only known Him as a man, their teacher, their leader, a possible Messiah, but related ultimately to this world. Now another world was coming into view, the infinitely greater world of the Spirit. But He graciously adapted Himself again to their much smaller world, and brought them safely, (yet miraculously still) to their own little seashore. But it was an important introduction to their truer destiny, something immeasurably greater! Paul spoke of the difference between knowing Christ, "After the flesh" ("From a worldly point of view", NIV) and knowing Him "after the spirit" (2 Cor. 5:16). That is the vital lesson we all have to learn. This explains the mysterious link between the request of those Greeks in John 12:21, and the (apparently) irrelevant response of Christ in verses 23 and 24. The pre-Calvary Jesus was only the single, "Corn of wheat"; the real Christ of God, is the immeasurable harvest that will be the eternal issue from that dying.

We can thank God that we live in a day of the greater and fuller unveilings. The Holy Spirit is here to guide us into all truth (John 16:12, 13). But, to return to our present point, these are treasures of darkness and we will probably see them best on dark days. It is then that, in a higher sense, we may receive Him into our ship, and see Him bring us safely home!

Conclusion

We conclude now with a verse of Scripture and a verse of song:

Lay thou thy treasure in the dust,
and the gold of Ophir among the stones of the brooks;
and The Almighty will be thy treasure,
and precious silver unto thee (Job 22:24, 25; RV).

Show me Thy face; one transient gleam
Of loveliness divine;
And I will never think or dream,
Of other loves save Thine.
All other lights will darken quite;
All other glories wane.
The beautiful of earth shall scarce
Seem beautiful again.

May God give us all the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, and enlighten the eyes of our understanding, and enable us to have increasing encounters with our living Lord, even in times of darkness (see Ephesians 1:17, 18). And may He graciously enrich us with the three "Treasures of Darkness" we have spoken of, even in our times of trial.

Darkness and its new song darkness and its accompanying new understanding of heavenly things darkness and the accompanying encounters with the living Christ Himself.