

SERMONS

ON

IMPORTANT SUBJECTS;

BY THE

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LATE OF PEMBROKE COLLEGE, OXFORD, AND CHAPLAIN TO
THE RIGHT HON. THE COUNTESS OF HUNTINGDON.

WITH A MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR,
BY SAMUEL DREW, A. M.

AND A

DISSERTATION ON HIS CHARACTER, PREACHING, &c.
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SERMON LXVI.

THE LORD OUR LIGHT.

The sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee, but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.—Isaiah lx. 19, 20.

UPON reading those words I cannot help thinking of what the royal psalmist said, “Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. Selah.” I am afraid, my dear hearers, that even believers themselves, who have tasted of the grace of God, reflect not and meditate as they ought, on the glorious and amazing felicity they are called by the Spirit of God to experience in this life. We content ourselves too much with our hopes, and if we attain to “a good hope through grace,” we are ready to think we have got up to the last step of the gospel ladder, and have nothing more to do but to rest in that hope, without ever attaining to an abiding, full assurance of faith. If we would examine the scriptures, and not choose to bring them down to us, but beg of God to raise our hearts up to them, we shall find the believer is made partaker of the grace of life, as well as an heir of it; the one is on earth, the other in heaven, and one is only a prelibation of the other. This blessed prophet Isaiah, speaking of the privileges of the children of God, saith, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things that God hath prepared (and that even here below) for those that love him:” God grant that we may be of that happy number! Hence, like an evangelist, the prophet draws aside the veil, and, as one inspired by the Spirit of God, and filled with the rays of divine light, gives us a transporting view of the gospel state, and the glory which the church militant enjoys below, before its triumphant state above.

The text probably refers to the great change that should be made in the affairs of the Jews after their captivity, how wonderfully God would appear for them, after their harps had been long hanging on the willows, and they could make no other answer to their insulting foes than this mournful one, “How can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” The gospel is, doubtless, glad tidings of great joy; and however the people of God might be encouraged to hope that the time would come, when they should tread on the necks of their enemies, the prophet teaches them to look further, and lets them know that their happiness was not to consist in any external created good, but in a larger possession of the graces and comforts of the Holy Ghost. So that this chapter speaks not only of a temporal deliverance and

rest, which they should enjoy after their trouble, but a spiritual rest, which by faith they should enter into here, as the earnest and pledge of the rest and enjoyment of the better world hereafter. As we know no more of heaven than is discovered by the eye of faith, for even St. Paul acknowledges, that the things he saw were unutterable, it is observable that heaven in scripture is described to us more by what it is not, than by what it is. So in the words of the text, “Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself, for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.” Here are three negatives, and but one positive, namely, “the Lord shall be thy everlasting light,” which is a beautiful allusion to the sun, that should teach us to spiritualize natural things; and if we feared God, and lived near to him as we ought, there is no object of our bodily eyes but might improve our spiritual sight. You cannot suppose the prophet meant a time should come, when the sun should not literally go down, that there should not be night and day as now: God indeed permitted a man once to say, “Sun, stand thou still,” and it was done; but, perhaps, there never will be any such thing again till the sun be removed from its station, and the moon forsake her orbit, and be turned into blood. The word must therefore be understood in a figurative sense; and then, comparing spiritual things with spiritual, it must certainly import, that Jesus Christ, the Sun of righteousness, shall be what the sun is to the visible world, that is, the light and life of all his people; I say, all the people of God. You see now, the sun shines on us all. I never heard that the sun said, Lord, I will not shine on the Presbyterians, I will not shine on the Independents, I will not shine on the people called Methodists, those great enthusiasts; the sun never said yet, I will not shine on the Papists; the sun shines on all, which shows that Jesus Christ’s love is open to all that are made willing by the Holy Ghost to accept of him; and therefore it is said, “the Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing under his wings.” If you were all up this morning before the sun arose at five o’clock, how beautiful was his first appearance! how pleasant to behold the flowers opening to the rising sun! I appeal to you yourselves, when you were looking out at the window, or walking about, or opening your shop, if in a spiritual frame, whether you did not say, Arise, thou Sun of righteousness, with healing under thy wings, on me. All that the natural sun is to the world, Jesus Christ is, and more, to his people; without the sun, we should have no corn, or fruit of any kind: what a dark place would the world be without the sun, and how dark would the world be without Jesus Christ; and as the sun does really communicate its rays to the earth, the plants, and to all this lower creation, so the Son of God does really communicate his life and power to every new-created soul, otherwise Christ is but a painted sun: and is Christ nothing but a painted Christ to us, while we receive heat and benefit by the

Holy Ghost, on account of the virtue of his blood? Sometimes the sun shines brighter than at other times, and does not always appear alike; clouds intervene, and interrupt its rays; so it is between a renewed soul and the Lord Jesus, the Sun of righteousness. O my brethren, I believe you know it by fatal experience: hold but your hand now, when the sun shines in its meridian, between it and you, and if by the breadth of that you can keep the sun from you, ah! how very little earth will keep off thy heart from Jesus Christ! It was a very excellent saying of one of the ancients, that God never leaves a person till he first leaves him. Some people think God does so of his sovereignty, but I am apt to think when the sun shines, we shall find some people have taken up with something short of the Sun of righteousness; and I believe there are times, when the poor believer thinks his sun will quite go down, and rise no more. He loses his relish, his taste and evidence, of divine things; not only are the rays intercepted for a while, but doubts and fears, a dreadful cloud of them come on. Though I hold with a full assurance of faith, yet I am of opinion that it is not always in a like exercise; and therefore pray that doubting people will not take hold of that, and say, Blessed be God, I am in a doubting state, and I am content. The Lord deliver you from a mind to stay in prison, and prevent the devil from locking the door upon you, and keeping you there as long as he can. The Lord help you to come; come, come, and break out of prison, that you may know how pleasant it is to behold the Sun and praise his name.

Sometimes, instead of the sun there is only moonlight, which shows the difference a believer feels in his soul, both in relation to grace and comfort. Both sun and moon give light, but O how far superior is the one to the other: the moon gives a very faint, uncertain light, waxes and wanes, and at best is almost nothing when compared with the light, and the blessed reviving heat of the sun. Hence, my brethren, this world sometimes is a world of mourners: it is said, “that the days of our mourning shall be ended;” for if the text refer to the future state, as no doubt it does, it means that the days of believers here below are very often mournful, trying, and afflicting, though they end in joy, as our Lord intimates in his opening his gospel-sermon almost with these very words, “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Some, perhaps, may think it is an odd kind of blessing: and though worldly people are fond of the fifth of Matthew, and wonder that Methodists and gospel-ministers do not preach oftener on that chapter, I am apt to believe, when you come to preach and open that word, they will not like that chapter any more than any other, because they are for a joyful Christ, and not for any mourning at all. Do you know God in Christ? Let me tell you, the more you are acquainted with him, the more your souls will be kept in a mourning state. A mournful state!—O, say you, people will mourn before they are converted.—Ah, that they will.—I do not

love to hear of conversions without any secret mourning; I seldom see such souls established. I have heard of a person who was in company once with fourteen ministers of the gospel, some of whom were eminent servants of Christ, and yet not one of them could tell the time God first manifested himself to their soul. Zaccheus's was a very quick conversion, perhaps not a quarter of an hour's conviction: this I mention, that we may not condemn one another. We do not love the pope, because we love to be popes ourselves, and set up our own experience as a standard to others. Those that had such a conversion as the jailor, or the Jews; O, say you, we do not like to hear you talk of shaking over hell, we love to hear of conversion by the love of God; while others that were so shaken, as Mr. Bolton and other eminent men were, may say, you are not Christians, because you had not the like terrible experience. You may as well say to your neighbour, you have not had a child, for you were not in labour all night. The question is, whether a real child be born, not how long was the preceding pain, but whether it were productive of a new birth, and whether Christ have been formed in your hearts: it is the birth, proves the reality of the thing.

Some allow that there is mourning before, but no mourning after conversion; pray who says so? None but an Antinomian, a rank Antinomian; and when you hear a person say, that after conversion you will have no mourning, you may be assured that person is at best walking by moonlight; he does not walk by the sun, he has got some doctrine in his head, but very little grace, I am afraid, in his heart. How! how! my brethren, not mourn after we are converted! Why, till then there is no true mourning at all. The damned in hell are mourning now, they put on their mourning as soon as they get there. How am I tormented in this flame, says Dives; and Cain, My punishment is greater than I can bear. How many worldly people break their hearts for the loss of the world! they cannot keep their usual equipage, nor do as they would; and come not to worship on Sunday, because they cannot appear so fine as formerly they did. This is a sorrow of the world that worketh death. But there is a blessed, a more evangelical mourning, which is the habitual, blessed state and frame of a converted soul. How strong the expression, "They shall look on him whom they have pierced, and shall mourn;" how shall they mourn? "As one mourneth for a first-born, an only child." Have you ever been called to bury a child? Is there any tender mother here? Were you merry directly after the child was dead? No, perhaps till this very day, you continually call to remembrance your little one, and shed a tear; everything relating to it causes the repetition of your sorrow. When a poor believer is acquainted with Jesus Christ, he mourns for having crucified the Son of God, and you will mourn for the same sin after conversion as before. Surely, say some, I mourn for my sins I committed before my conversion. I do not know whether you do or no,

but I know you should. O, says David, "Remember not against me the sins of my youth," in a psalm which was written when he was an old man; and Paul says, "I was a blasphemer and injurious, and therefore not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God;" and this after he had been wrapped up to the third heaven. See Mary rushing into the house, washing her Lord's feet with her tears, and wiping them with her hair. I do not suppose she was dressed as our ladies are now. They did not make such apes of themselves. But her hair was very fine in an honest way: though she breaks the alabaster box of ointment, given her perhaps by some poor silly creature that would die by her frowns, and live upon her smiles, see her at the feet of her Saviour; and Jesus Christ answers for her, (some having thought she was profuse,) that having had much forgiven, she loved much. The more the love of God is manifested, the more it will melt the soul down: I appeal to you Christians, whether the sweetest times you ever enjoyed, were not those when you were much melted at the sight of a crucified Saviour; when you could say, Lord, thou forgivest me, I feel it, I know it, but I cannot forgive myself. This will always be the effect of an ingenuous mind, and a person that is really converted will thus mourn; and if you do not know this, you may be assured you know nothing savingly of Jesus Christ. You may go and hear this and that warning, and you are right to gather honey from every flower, but you have not got within the inner court, but are yet without. God give you to see your folly herein.

A true believer will mourn over his corruptions. I wonder what they can think, who suppose they have no corruptions? I remember a poor creature of Rhode-Island, who looked the most like the old Puritans I ever saw. When I was talking with him, and said, Some people say there are some men that have no sin, he said, if you send such a man to me, I will pay his charges even from England, and back again. I have often learned something from the difference of glasses: you look into the common glasses, and see yourselves there so fine, and admire your person, dress, &c. but when you view yourselves through a microscope, how many worms are discovered in that fine skin of yours, enough to make you ashamed of the vermin and filth that is seated there: so it is in filth, that glass would show you so much corruption cleaving to every action of your lives, that would make you sin-sick, and mourn that you have known God so long, and are like him so little. What says Paul? "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Notwithstanding he knew that "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus," yet cries out, "O wretched man that I am!" I should have thought, O happy man that thou art! formerly a persecutor, and now a preacher. A man that has been honoured so much above every man in planting churches, which is the highest honour a man can have under heaven. Here is a man that has been wrapt up to the third heaven,—what of

him? “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death?” Do you think that it was only a little qualm of conscience? No, it was the habitual temper of his heart. Some people are much humbled by fits and starts, but Paul felt this daily: many things that we are not concerned about, Paul looked upon them as such that made his heart ache, because he thought he could not live near enough to God. He not only watched to do good, but he watched how he did that good; and nature was so mixed with it, that he said, I cannot do as I would do. I would have served God like an angel, but I find myself to be a poor sinner after all; and if we are likeminded with Paul, we shall mourn over our corruptions, we shall mourn over our hidden sins, that none know but God and ourselves. It is a very dangerous thing to trust gospel-gossips, who being strangers to themselves, hear with wonder and contempt, and often betray. However, a judicious friend, into whose bosom we can pour out our souls, and tell our corruptions as well as our comforts, is a very great privilege. When our corruptions do not drive us from Christ, but drive us to him, it is the greatest blessing to commune with Christ on this side heaven: and, my brethren, if your hearts are right with God, you will see such things as nobody else could think of. A good woman, who was charmed with Dr. Manton, said, O, sir, you have made an excellent sermon today, I wish I had your heart: Do you so, said he, good woman, you had better not wish for it, for if you had it, you would wish for your own again. The best of men see themselves in the worst light.

How many thousand things are there that make you mourn here below! who can tell the tears that godly parents shed for ungodly children! O you young folks, you do not know what plague your children may be to you! O they are pretty things while young, like rattlesnakes and alligators, which I have seen when little; but put them in your bosom, and you will find they are dangerous. How many are there in the world that would wish, if it were lawful, that God had written them childless: there is many a poor creature that makes his father’s heart ache. I once asked a godly widow, Madam, how is your son? she turned aside with tears, and said, Sir, he is no son to me now. What in the world can come up to that! Here, says one, I have bred up my children. I cannot charge myself with educating them wrong, though few parents can say that, for many parents lead them into the paths of death, and so are murderers of their own children, and by their manner of education help to damn them for ever. But if you can say, I have done all I could, and yet, O my God, my children are worse than any other people’s; this is a dreadful state indeed. And the more you mourn, the more they laugh at you; O these are my godly parents. They increase their trouble, like Dr. Horneck’s son, who said, “There is not a post in my father’s house but stinks of piety.” I once saw a man that was awakened at the Orphan-house,

fall down and throw himself on one of their beds, crying out, O sir, what will become of my poor gray-headed father, who knows nothing of this birth! It is a difficulty with some to know how to behave towards unconverted relations. If you do not go to them, they will say you are precise; if you do, and are faithful, they will soon shew you they have enough of your company. This sends a godly person home mourning. And then there comes a thought, Shall I speak to them any more, or let them go to the devil? This is not like parting from your friends by death, but burying them alive; when dead, we know we must submit, but to part from friends, those we loved, and thought to have lived with till we came to heaven, is mournful indeed.—Moreover, the poor state of the church makes many a minister and close-walker with God to weep over the desolations of the sanctuary, and to mourn for those that will not mourn for themselves: thus our Lord wept over Jerusalem, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children, as a hen gathereth her chickens,” but it is over with thee now; the decree is gone forth, and Jerusalem shall suffer.

Brethren, the time will fail, and therefore I leave it to you to supply more cases: for if I were to preach till tomorrow morning, I doubt not but a thousand here would say, there are many things you have not mentioned yet. You know the state of your own heart, and the many particular trials in your own case. And you may also know, though your trial seems over, it is only changed: but let it be observed, the day of your mourning shall be ended; mind, it is but days, though sometimes made very sad ones indeed, by the neglect and ingratitude of those who have made the people of God serve them with rigour, as though all the world was made for them, as well as their incapacity to help themselves, by poverty, pain, sore sicknesses, and of long continuance. This has been, and is the lot of many a child of God. Blessed be sovereign mercy, it is but a few days. An end shall arrive, and that end shall be happy, when death, the believer’s friend, shall come with an angel’s face, to dismiss them from all their sin and sorrow. When I was last at Bristol, I could not help remembering good Mr. Middleton, who used, you know, to have the gout very much, and in that closet were kept his crutches: now, thought I, he needs them no more, the days of his mourning are ended, and so shall ours by and by too, when we shall no longer want our spiritual crutches or armour, but shall say to the helmet of hope, the shield of faith, I have no more need of thee; and the all-prevailing weapon of prayer be changed into songs of endless praise, when God himself shall be our everlasting light, a sun that shall never go down more, but shall beam forth his infinite and eternal love in a beatific state for ever. The prospect of this made one of the fathers cry out, O glory! how great! how great! what art thou? A friend asking him what he saw? he answered, I see the glory of the only begotten Son of God. And if a sight of Christ on earth

is so great, as could make good Mr. Wardrobe, an excellent Scotch minister, say, after he was given over, starting up in the arms of an excellent friend who told it me, in a rapture of joy, Crowns! crowns! crowns of glory shall adorn this head of mine ere long! and stretching up, added, palms! palms! palms shall ere long fill these hands of mine! and so sweetly fell asleep in Jesus: what a pleasing, awful trial is that for an affectionate friend! So our dear sister, who is to be buried tomorrow night at Tottenham-court, talked with her friends for an hour or two, and took leave of her husband and children, and said, Now come, ye heavenly chariots! We shall thank God then for all our losses, crosses, and disappointments; and I believe those things which we mourn for most, and puts us most to the trial, will give us most comfort when we come to die. God shall be our everlasting light, as well as the days of our mourning shall be ended.—Take care, do not be secure, pray do not think the day of your mourning to be ended yet: you may put off mourning for your friends, but may have fresh cause of mourning for your souls; whilst you remember that holy mourning is consistent with holy walking, following the Lord in all his ways. You have often heard me speak of one of our ministers, who was not one of you fine velvet mouths, that said once in the pulpit, As sure as you see the sun shine on my breast, which at that time it did, so sure does the Spirit of God dwell in the souls of true believers. How often has he told you, “I am for having you have godly sorrow, I wish your hearts were full of it, because it will end in everlasting joy. Comfort, my brethren, one another with these things, the day of your mourning shall soon be ended for ever.

But what am I to say? I apprehend I shall grow forgetful tonight;—I have spoken so much to saints, I am afraid I shall have but little time to speak to sinners. I mean, I have taken so much time up in speaking to you that know God, that I have but little to speak to you that know him not. How different your state, poor hearts! poor hearts! my soul mourns for you. My blood, whilst I am speaking, is ready to curdle in my veins. The seraphic Mr. Hervey, when he did me the honour to sojourn under my roof, said, My dear friend, it is an awful thing when we see an unconverted man die, and his eyes closed, to think that that poor soul will never see one gleam of comfort or life more; to have a sight of God, of Christ, and the heavenly angels and saints; but to see what the rich man saw, a God they want; to see Lazarus, whom he would not permit to be seen at his door, now taken particular notice of in heaven; and to see himself now a beggar in hell. The Lord help you to think! O think how soon your sun will go down, and even your bodies will feel damnation, not only in respect to pain, but loss.

Bishop Usher’s opinion was, and I heartily concur in it, that those who value themselves most on their beauty and dress, and do not love God on earth, will be most deformed in hell, and their bodies suffer proportionally

there. There is no dressing in hell, nothing but fire and brimstone there, and the wrath of God always awaiting on thee, O sinner, whoever thou art, man or woman. It was a fine saying of Maclane, who was executed some years ago, when the cap was pulling over his eyes. Must I never see the light of yon sun any more? Lord Jesus Christ, thou Sun of righteousness, arise with healing under thy wings on my departing soul!—May the Lord Jesus Christ do that for us all! When you are damned, the days of your mourning will be but at their beginning; there is no end of your mourning in hell. There is but one song, if it may be called so, in hell, to wit, that of Dives, which will be always repeating, “How am I tormented in this flame!” Consider this, ye that forget God; and O that God may bless you tonight with godly sorrow. Believers, pray for them. Lord help you sinners to pray for your vile selves. Some may think, what do you cry for? why, I cry for you. Perhaps you will say as a wicked one did to a poor woman in Scotland, when thousands were awakened there; seeing her weep, he said, what do you weep for? For this people, says she: Weep for yourself, says he: she replied, I do; but what is my soul, to all these poor souls! O that ministers may never rise up in judgment against you: O may Moses, in the hand of the Spirit, make you mourn! may the love of God make you cry! may you not go home tonight without an arrow steeped in the blood of Christ. It was wonderful what a good woman, awaking, thought she saw written over her head, “O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord!” May every earthly soul be made to hear it; to awake, arise from their sleep in sin. The sun is going down, and death may put an end to all tonight: the Lord help you to come, though it is the eleventh hour. O that you would fly, fly this night to Christ, lest God destroy you forever. Jesus stands ready with open arms to receive you whom he has first pricked to the heart, and made you cry out, “What shall I do to be saved!” he will then make you believe in his name, that you may be saved. God grant this may be the case of all here tonight. *Amen.*