

## Darkness You Can Feel (Exodus 10)

I Darkness can be used as a metaphor for several things. (Ignorance, fear, and death are the most common things represented by the metaphor. To these we could add insecurity, frustration, hopelessness, helplessness, and depression. As we lengthen the list, we begin to realize that *feeling* darkness is as much an emotional and psychological condition as it is a physical sensation.)

A There are two specific ways to feel darkness. (As we just showed, we might feel things emotionally and psychologically, as well as physically. Now we know that most people exhibit certain autonomic and physiological responses to things like fear and anger, instinctively, that is, without forethought. We should point out here that when there are emotional or psychological stimuli and an immediate physical response, the two things (stimulus and response) frequently follow in rapid succession, and the longer they continue to succeed each other, the harder it becomes to break the cycle. *That* condition is called panic.)

B We say, None is so blind as he who will not see. (Let us leave the field of psychology to those more expert than we, for the moment, and get back to our scripture text. When someone gives us good advice, and we meditate on the merits of accepting the advice until we come to agree with our advisor, we say “I saw the Light”; and education is frequently referred to as “enlightenment”. Thus we might say that Moses and Aaron *turned on the light* for Pharaoh, and he still did not see things from God’s point of view. *Blinded* by his arrogance and ignorance, he could not see the light of God’s truth because he would not see it. So now, with a plague of darkness, God removed all the natural light from Egypt to impress Pharaoh with the importance of light, specifically, light from the Word of God. We ought to recall here that Jesus was *the Light of the World, that Light shined in darkness and darkness comprehended it not*; but darkness attempted to

extinguish the light instead, by killing Jesus. Then as Jesus hung dying on the Cross, (Matthew 27:45) *from the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land*. God is about life; life and light are in God; as the life of Jesus was ebbing away, natural light disappeared from the world as well. So in Biblical literature, darkness precedes death.)

II In one case, darkness is a metaphor for ignorance. (We will note that no one likes to think that they, themselves, are ignorant. We prefer to think that we *already* saw the light, and that benighted intelligence is no longer our problem. Yet it is our problem, in two ways. First, those who think in this way do not usually know as much as they think they know, especially with respect to literary criticism of Biblical texts. Secondly, and just in case we are correct about our own enlightenment, believers in particular have a certain duty to teach others. Now let us recall that no one needs a university degree in mechanical engineering in order to operate a bicycle; anyone who knows how to do it can teach someone else to do it too. We might make the same comment about frying hotcakes, speaking English, or adding up a grocery bill. The point here is that what we generally call education need not be nearly as formal or as expensive as it is. Now we need to give special consideration to one certain kind of education: God clearly makes parents responsible to teach their own children to honor Him. It is Mom's and Dad's business, not the churches' business, and churches that attempt to replace parents with Sunday Schools and after-school weekday programs are just as much on the wrong track as the public schools are. Ezekiel 44:23 defines the role of the Christian educator very clearly: *teach my people the difference between the holy and the profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean*. We hold that Sunday Schools and other church programs that do *not* do these things have no moral right to educate anyone's children about anything.)

A The most innocent ignorance can be cured by instruction. (If our ignorance is innocent then we need not be afraid to ask for information from knowledgeable people. We would not expect someone who already knows an answer to ask a question unless it is a teacher who teaches by the Socratic Method. Similarly, we would not suspect that a rebellious teenager is innocent, even if his incessant *why* began as a reasonable question. Now let us turn to Pharaoh. He is certainly not innocent, although he is surely ignorant about the things of God. There is a marked absence of questions on his part. He never asked Moses why the Hebrews needed to leave Egypt to worship God (he already knew why); he never asked Moses how he might win a reprieve from God's judgment, either (he already knew that too). Pharaoh appears to be a man who knows exactly what he must do, but he is far too proud to do it. Proud and stubborn people are loath to admit that they made any mistakes. They would prefer to make everyone believe that the problems in their lives (or countries, or economies, or churches) arise from a determined effort to embarrass them, when all they want to do is save their face. Such faces should not be saved. If we follow Jesus we will not even try.)

B Some people are ignorant because of deception. (Ignorance that results from deception begins as the innocent variety. Honest believers can cure both ignorance and deception with truth. And then something rather odd follows, in some people who were previously deceived. They don't all like to admit to their ignorance, even when it came innocently. Some people invest so much of their own ego in a false hope that they prefer perpetuating the deception to correcting it. Then they not only cling to their own delusions, they insist on *saving face* for the people who deceived them, on justifying the persistence of their own error, and on legitimizing the error so that they do not appear to be so ignorant for believing it. If such a people also graduated from a seminary with a degree in

theology (or perhaps, Missions English), they may think that they have the right to teach their errors in churches and that churches are obliged to pay them a salary to do so. In their Sunday School classes then, and in the congregations where they preach, more victims of error will perpetuate the cycle by believing their teachers and then trying to save their faces too.

Let us be very plain here. The faith of a believer (and we stipulate, *correct* faith, informed by a *proper* understanding of the Word of God) is the repository of the Grace of God; the institutional church is not. (This is why Romans 1:17 tells us that the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, from first to last.) Remember, please, that God forgives people who repent and forsake sins; not those who attend Sunday Schools or churches and learn errors from sermons and songs. There is a place in Heaven for the Children of God who are born again by their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; not for the impenitent sinners who fill up church pews (or platforms) with warm bodies in order to make someone else's program look good. Matthew 22:14 says, *Many are called, few are chosen.*

Now in the case of Pharaoh, we see ignorance *and* deception. Some of the deception came from Pharaoh himself, and some of it came from people who let him continue to believe in his own divinity. Ignorance and deception plague our churches for the same reasons. Some leaders deceive themselves about how important they are to the Kingdom of God; and some are deceived by the *yes-men* who let them continue to think that they are more important than they really are.)

C Uneducated people acclimatize themselves to their darkness. (What can we say, then, of the innocently ignorant people who *receive instruction in wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity* (Proverbs 1:3)? They listen to correct doctrine. They repent and forsake sin. They read the Bible for what it says, and pray about how to do the Will of God in their daily lives. They also have no authority to

make decisions about the policies of civil or ecclesiastical society. They are the meek, whom Jesus said would inherit the earth. They are the sheep who hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and will not follow any other. They learn from Jesus how to let the Light of the World shine from the lampstand of their lives. They learn how to minister to those who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness by giving them the Bread of Life and the Living Water from the Word of God. I speak of us, the real, spiritual, Capital-C Church. We become a sort of sub-culture in the larger society, where the Kingdom of God flourishes in our hearts and in our dealings with one another. And we take advantage of each opportunity to evangelize unbelievers with the Gospel of Salvation by Grace so that the Kingdom of God may grow in proportion to the love of God that is in us.

Now have you ever met someone who did not realize that he was *wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked* (Revelation 3:17)? We see them all the time. Some of them need only be enlightened with the Gospel of Salvation by Grace through faith in order to join us in the eternal Kingdom of God. The rest are used to the darkness, and they are comfortable in it. They acclimatized themselves to it. They know, as every blind man knows, where the chairs are, and they don't like it if someone moves something. This is why *they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord* (Proverbs 1:29); and it does not matter whether Moses was talking to Pharaoh in Exodus 10 or if we were talking to someone in the institutional church (who is not as important to God as he thinks he is). They are blind about the things of God; and they are content to stay that way.)

III In another case, darkness is a metaphor for fear. (By one definition, fear is irrational and emotional, and a natural response when we are surprised by something we don't understand. Terror is prolonged fear. We may suppose that ordinary Egyptians, who probably suffered most from the 10 Plagues, felt this

kind of fear every time a new calamity arrived; and the terror of *Oh, no, what now?* would have perplexed them greatly. This kind of fear has a very definite physiological effect. There comes a heavy feeling in the chest, a shortness of breath, increased pulse, and a flood of adrenalin, as the body prepares its “fight or flight” response. This is another way to feel darkness.

We might suppose that Pharaoh and his officials felt the physiological results of fear, but that they dealt with their fear differently. They were educated, we might say *enlightened*, by astrology and magical arts; they knew how to deal with their fears about the future the same way a trained soldier knows how to deal with a street thug. Now let us try to imagine the darkness of their fears, when they realized that their combined knowledge and abilities were no match for the plagues with which God now afflicted them.

This calls for another definition of fear. It is the kind of feeling we might experience if no ATM machine would accept any plastic card, and a phone call to the bank revealed that all available funds had been impounded, and government tax officials were at that moment in court seeking authorization to dispossess you of everything you have or every hoped to have... and all because of a clerical error that you have no power to redress. At that point, helplessness replaces fear; and we would likely grasp at any solution anyone offered, and without much rational reflection. Pharaoh did. He relented twice in Chapter 10, only to retract his permission and defy God again.)

A Fear and trust are both natural, and they are related. (Trust is just as natural as fear. Trust is the natural result of nurture, and of other conditioning. The child who returns from school every day to find Mom busy preparing a snack learns to trust Mom and the snack always to be there. The teenager who learns that some adults offer good advice while others are only 10-or 20-year-older versions of

himself learns quickly whom to approach with questions about life. Then when a young adult learns that the respectability and integrity that he thought he had seen in older adults was only pretension and face-saving, they learn very quickly whom *not* to trust, and betrayal of trust engenders cynicism that may never go away. (This is why Jesus said that if someone offended a child it would be better to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck.) If some young person trusts in you or me, we have a terrific responsibility for them; we have to really *be* honest and *have* integrity, not just appear so. Treachery creates fear, too, by causing young people to think that they cannot trust anyone.

Now let us recall that *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear* (1 John 4:18). So, how can we get from fear to love? We must trust in God, for God is Love, and He never betrays our trust. We who claim to love God must learn to exhibit that kind of love in our lives too: love in which others can trust, no matter what kind of problem caused the fear they bring to it. The connection, and the result, is respect. We learn to love God, Who first loved us; we learn to trust God, Who never forsakes us; we learn to respect His Word and His Will, and the pastors and teachers who led us to that point in our faith. Now let us remember, *By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil* (Proverbs 16:6). The iniquity came first. It is in us from our birth. Pharaoh never recognized truth nor sought mercy; therefore his fear was never *of the Lord* and it never taught him to depart from evil.

So now we see a more sinister side of trust. Bad things happened in Egypt because of Pharaoh's hard heart; and more bad things were coming. He learned to trust Moses to say so, and to depend upon God's wrath to deliver on the promises (or, threats) from Moses. So, each time Pharaoh saw Moses, he got another warning; each time his heart became a little harder, and each time

something worse happened than had ever happened than before. Pharaoh came to dread the appearance of Moses. We may suppose that the very thought of him could cause nightmares. If you can imagine your worst fear taking on a corporeal form and interrupting your dinner as well as your dreams, then you can imagine what *the kind of darkness you can feel* felt like.)

B Children see things in darkness with their imaginations, and with their spirits.

(Now we should recall that the child is born with a corrupted human nature, and even if he has not yet understood sin and guilt, he still needs Jesus to save him from the Original Sin. To this we should add that there is some time in the child's early life when he has not yet either understood or committed any sins. Jesus said, *That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven* (Matthew 18:10). Children fear darkness because of the absence of light, and because their spirits sense the presence of evil in the world; and more acutely in the darkness. Some children watch so much TV and see so many movies that they imagine things to be present in darkness that are not there, too. Now to be sure, the time comes for us all when our spirit is not innocent any longer, and we may be certain that such a time had long since passed for Pharaoh. Adults have imaginations too. In some cases the adult's spirit is so perverse that *his heart devises wicked imaginations* (Proverbs 6:18) with which to frighten others for pecuniary gains. God knows how to turn a man's imagination against him. This is what Job was referring to when he said, *the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me* (Job 3:25). With our imaginations we can see every possibility. If the vision of our imagination is a good one we might even call it faith; but if it is bad, we hope that it never becomes reality. God knows how to manipulate hope and hopelessness; and He knows how to make us fear the worst even if the probability of its coming

to pass is negligible. Pharaoh would have felt the Plague of darkness in this way. Now there is a note of caution here: Pharaoh felt the darkness, to be sure; but when God said, *darkness you can feel*, He was talking to Moses, and everyone including Moses would have felt the darkness, for various reasons.)

C (This brings us back to how Pharaoh's problems are like our own.) Fear engenders both respect and contempt. (As we noted, *men depart from evil by the fear of the Lord*. Pharaoh did not have that kind of fear of God; but God prefers that all men depart from evil. Now let us recall that when we come to God as penitent sinners, He is merciful and forgiving, and patient, even if we do not learn righteousness as fast as our friends did. Our fear of God teaches us to trust His mercy; His mercy teaches us to trust His love; His love teaches us to trust His promises rather than fear His threats. The love of God is perfect and perfect love drives out all fear. We learn to respect His Will and His Word, and His ministers who lead us to do so. But such was not the case with Pharaoh, because of his hard heart. So while fear leads the children of God to repentance and the benefits that follow, fear can also engender contempt. Now we might think that believers should not be contemptuous of anyone, but we have no better word to describe our reaction to abuse of authority, to strict adherence to a list of rules without any consideration for the inconveniences such adherence causes for others, to rules with no rational justification, and to the imposition of penalties untempered by mercy and compassion. We are likely to resent the rules and become bitter against the authorities who enforce them because we are not yet as humble as Jesus was; but Pharaoh's contempt for God's demands and for Moses who delivered them came from an exactly opposite condition. We say that we are not yet as humble as Jesus was because the humility of Jesus is our model, and we all agree (although we don't all follow through with it) that Jesus is the model that

we should emulate. Pharaoh did not aspire to emulate Jesus, or Moses, or anyone else. Pharaoh was not just proud; creating the illusion that he himself was god was his ambition, and he could not both appear to be divine and appear to submit to the demands of any other deity. We call that attitude humanism, and Pharaoh's case was an extreme example of it. We see such extreme examples in the policies and policy-makers of contemporary governance too, and sadly, in the leaders of institutional churches as well. Institutional churches try to make everyone believe that they are God's franchise, so to speak, and the ones who give or withhold permission for people like us to do as we are doing this morning.)

IV There are physiological responses to sudden changes in levels of light. (Now let us return to our considerations of how one might feel darkness. We have shown how fear creates certain autonomic physiological responses; and we have seen how the imagination can make fears we imagine even worse than reality. Fear of darkness, and of what might be in the darkness that we cannot see, is one of the oldest fears of humanity. Now let us add to this, if we can, the discomfort the eyes would feel, when the iris has already expanded as far as it can and still tries to open more. That is what would happen in total darkness. The iris expands to allow more light to enter the eye, and contracts to limit its entry. If ambient light is dim, the iris expands a lot; if ambient light is nonexistent, the muscle in the iris will relax as much as it can and then, finding that there is still insufficient light to stimulate the retina, will attempt to open even more. The retina, thus deprived of any stimulation, would begin to die; and the eyeball would begin to dry out, because we would hold our eyes open longer and wider than normal, afraid even to blink, for fear of missing something. That, also, is darkness you can feel.)

A The threat of imminent death from a ruined food supply created fear for

the present and the future. (The plague of blood had ruined the fishing season, the plague of hail had ruined the summer crops, and now the grasshoppers ate what the hail had left. Darkness is a metaphor for several things, including death. When darkness descended over Egypt, Pharaoh was right to think that his worst fear was about to overtake him. We sympathize with small children who are afraid of darkness, and do what we can to re-assure them; we almost feel some sympathy for Pharaoh, here too, as he almost pleads with Moses to go. But his heart is hard; he wants the Hebrews to return to their servitude; he seeks to preserve his authority and save his face; he refuses to surrender. He probably thought that things cannot possibly get worse. He lashed out, and threatened to kill Moses if he ever came again.)

B Fear, helplessness and hopelessness, working together, result in repetitious cycles of fear, helplessness, and hopelessness. (There is no way out for Pharaoh, and he knows it. The locusts made him feel helpless and the darkness made him feel hopeless, Moses was the only person who was available to serve as the object of his anger. There was no confession of sin, in that last conversation between Pharaoh and Moses. At the end of Chapter 10, Pharaoh is a broken man, but his hard heart still prevents his repentance.)

C There are just two ways to break the cycle of fear, helplessness, and hopelessness. (The most obvious and most desirable way for Pharaoh would have been repentance, but that got harder to do as the plagues got worse, and in the end, it was so hard that he could not even confess sin, much less repent it. We probably all know people who feel such a need to justify themselves that this is the case for them too. And so the other way to break the cycle is not to submit but to demand submission; we might say, not to get ulcers but to give them, not to get stress but to give it. Just as some victims of abuse relieve their victimization

by becoming abusive, and as children who are victims of schoolyard bullies often become bullies when they are older and bigger, so Pharaoh exercised his power by subjecting powerless and voiceless slaves to the abuses of servitude. Then, as the teenage bullies, adult child-abusers, and arrogant ecclesiastical authorities eventually *eat of the fruit of their own ways and are filled with their own devices* (Proverbs 1:31), so Moses left Pharaoh alone, to endure the wrath of God, alone.)

V Let us imagine the frustrations that would accompany total darkness. (After a consideration of all the psychological and physiological impairments, we should take a moment to reflect on a very practical problem. There was no light at all. They could not see well enough to find the candles, or the matches to light them. During their searches for candles and matches, they no doubt banged their shins on the coffee tables as they stumbled around their houses, and cut their fingers on table knives that were stored in the same kitchen drawers. Then, as frantic as they must have been to find candles, they had to search for band-aids too!)

A The Egyptian sun-god was unable to help them. (That was really the point. That was God's purpose for the plague of darkness. The sun-god was the most important god in Egypt after Pharaoh, and the sun-god could not help them. Just in case anyone still trusted in Pharaoh and his false claims of divinity, God will pass judgment on him too, in the next two chapters.)

B (Now the Bible tells us,) *Children of the Light and children of the day are not of the night, nor of the darkness* (1 Thessalonians 5:5). We wish to conclude this morning's message by reminding everyone that believers are different from unbelievers. Christians are children of God, and God is Light. The light of His life and His love illumine the paths of our lives, which is not the case with non-believers. This fact was also illustrated for the Children of Israel in Chapter 10, in that they had light in their houses, but the Egyptians did not. We, believers, have Light in our lives, and that light is Jesus; nonbelievers do not. Darkness is still a metaphor for us, for the spiritual condition of unbelievers. We need to share our light with them.