

The glory of that light

Part 1

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Duration	00:48:11
Online version	https://www.audioteaching.org/en/sermons/jpa002/the-glory-of-that-light

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[00:00:01] Paul had a vision that he never forgot and if a title is wanted for this address then it's already been read in the text. The glory of that light.

Years had passed when the Apostle Paul spoke of the glory of that light. What light was it? You've followed the reading in the 22nd chapter of Acts how Paul tells in very few words of himself brought to a halt on the Damascus Road.

Of course Saul was a blind man when he left Jerusalem but he didn't know it. He [00:01:04] was a blind Pharisee. He comes into the bracket of those to whom the Lord spoke repeatedly in the Gospels. He was blinder than blind Bartimaeus but he didn't know it. He was a conceited young man. He was of the rising generation but he was traditional, oh yes, to the last extent that he was prepared to stand for tradition without questioning where it came from. He'd been well-schooled. He was a scholar. Obviously a very, very intelligent man. Obviously a man who had [00:02:06] come of a wealthy family. He was a citizen living in no mean city. He lived in the best suburbs no doubt. He felt himself rightly amongst the favoured few but he had something to learn. Something that you and I must learn that as men whether we're the beggar in the gutter or the humble worker or the skilled artisan, the executive, the manager, the director, the shareholder, be it who we may, man or woman, white-skinned, polished, educated or [00:03:10] of any other type, we must learn that we are blind. And Saul, I say, was a blind man when he left Jerusalem and he was leading blind men straight into the ditch according to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. You're very familiar with his conversion, I'm sure. It isn't that I'm going to take this to pieces word by word, nor is it my first purpose, though we must [00:04:01] not overlook it or shirk, it is not my first purpose to preach a simple gospel. But should there be anyone in here tonight who has come in with a sense that they're on a journey in life and they're not sure of the outcome, if there's any one of us and you know we can all put on a good appearance and it's not the person with the sad face that has a sad heart, it's often the person with a smile on their face that has a sad heart. There is somebody, the God of heaven, who reads the heart. But in the witness that Saul gave on the steps on which he stood after [00:05:04] being rescued by the civil powers and drawn out of the throng which were prepared to lynch him because of his turn from tradition, he stood there and he told that sweet story that you've heard of how having gained a written authority he made that northern journey up through the Golan Heights up to Damascus, a road that if you've ever seen it, as it's been my privilege to travel it, will be clearly in your mind. And in that deserted place he says suddenly about noon there shone from heaven a great light around about me. He was travelling north so the sun [00:06:08] was slightly behind him, wasn't it? Directly behind him, not quite overhead so that it was not in his eyesight when there came a light brighter than the sun. In our day probably we've got the wise men who could produce a light brighter than the sun over a short

distance. But remember that he lived in the day of the oil lamp and the torch which can scarcely be seen on a fine day. He was overpowered with a light from heaven, a light from heaven. And he says of that light, [00:07:01] I could not see for the glory of that light. He was light-blinded. You may not suffer from this. I found out a year or two ago to my great surprise that with the knowledge of what, 30-40 years, my optician said to me, but you've always been badly adjusted to the change of light and darkness, bad accommodation, takes me minutes to get used to it, minutes or not. I don't know how Paul was adjusted. He was a very agile man. But he saw a light which brought him to the dust and it was a God of heaven that shone round him. And I wonder if you and I, even as believers, [00:08:03] have ever had an experience when God has spoken to us that has so overpowered us that it's blinded our natural sight to everything else. Now God said, I go back, God shone that light from heaven, not just to blind his eyes, but to shine into his heart. Because God always acts in a positive way and his heart's feeling towards you is one of love. God is love. That's his disposition towards [00:09:12] this world. It's his disposition towards you. There's a lot of trouble in the world. I don't mean at this moment international avarice and war or political intrigue or corruption in high places. I mean talking of the individuals and God treats you as an individual and he knows you personally as an individual. He made you. He made you for himself. And God has an aim, if I may say so, very reverently say so, that he aims at the heart of the man. He certainly doesn't need your wealth. He doesn't [00:10:15] need your advice. He doesn't need your knowledge. He wants your heart. He wanted Saul's heart and he threw a light from heaven around him which blinded Saul for quite some time in a physical way. But when he did open his eyes, he opened it, he opened them in a new world with a new sense of direction.

[00:11:04] He was like the blind man that the Lord opened his eyes who could say, one thing I know, once I was blind, now I can see. But Paul, as we know him, Saul at this time, when his eyes were opened after his baptism, when God had dealt with him like that, he was a new man. Why? Because God had shone into his heart.

Now God has said quite a lot in the Bible about the heart of man. Let me refresh your memory very quickly. In Genesis 6, God saw every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

[00:12:15] That was right from the beginning. After sin had entered in, it wasn't just a lapse and a recovery, it was a fallen nature that run true to nature, always going down. And as men spread across the world, there was no throwback in the human race to innocence. There was no throwback in any one individual to righteousness. It was a progression that God saw that every [00:13:02] imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually. And if we educate such a person, we help them to develop these imaginations more quickly. We put into the hands and into the minds of men, whether they're grown up or little men, the wickedness of this world and help them more progressively to produce the fruit of a fallen nature. Of course, God worked in judgment. He had a flood. He almost annihilated the human race and he brought it back to a new head and anew. But God still said after that, the imaginations [00:14:08] of man's heart is evil from his youth. And so, if there's anyone got an idea, some people still hold in their hearts that men are improving and sooner or later, you know, we'll find things will adjust themselves and then just let's get ourselves offset. And listen to what God says about us from the distance that he looks down, from the wisdom of his knowledge and from the penetrating power that he has to know every thought that lingers in your mind and the very words that even you probably don't even say, but are there by intent. [00:15:09] The imaginations of man's heart, evil from his youth. What did David say? David had a heart. Oh God called him a man after my own heart. David, what can we say of you? Well, David had a heart that

led him into all sorts of excess. For what the world would call love, he committed murder. It was an affair of the heart. He was running through to type that every imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth up. Of course, David had his [00:16:08] moments. He had moments when he wasn't governed by his heart, he was governed by his faith in God and it was at those moments when the terror was on, when the enemy was knocking at the door, when he looked upon and I think must have despised an impotent king with an enemy and a king who hadn't the courage to go and fight him. And he must have looked down his seven elder brothers, younger brothers do look at elder brothers rather despisngly, I say that from knowledge to my shame, but he must have looked at them and written them off one by one in his mind as he said, in the name of the Lord of hosts, he was prepared [00:17:06] to challenge God's enemy, the one who defied. So David, he had a big heart, but it was one of which he had to say in his later life, Mark you, created me a clean heart, O Lord.

There came a day when God shone into David's heart. It was the accusing finger, the accusation of the prophet, who could say, thou art the man that cracked David and his heart failed him. It always will. Every man has a breaking point and the enemy of your soul will take [00:18:03] you past that breaking point if he can. Therefore I come back and say, is it not true, is it not consistent with what the scripture teaches us, that God aims not just to take your talents, but he can work without them. He wants your heart. He wants it all. He wants it emptied of sin and he is able to create in you a clean heart. It is of course the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses from all sin. Oh, but you say, that's a long time ago, a thousand years before the Lord Jesus Christ came. Well, Jeremiah, he spoke about the hearts of men [00:19:10] and he said, the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. So as we come through the scripture, we find that the statements are maintained and strengthened.

The heart deceitful above all things. It commits murder in the name of love. It's fickle.

The heart of man is an alien to the truth. The heart of man is under the power of the enemy and it's just that centre, that seat of the being that God aims at. He aims at [00:20:14] it in grace. And furthermore, he has the recipe, the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh yes, you say, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. Yes, but don't let's forget that though grace came and that was God's intention, grace can only be based on truth. Grace doesn't pretend. It takes off the cover and before there can be a qualification for grace, there must be that state of confessed [00:21:06] sinnership else God can't handle at all. What did the Lord Jesus Christ say about a man's heart? In Mark he says, from the heart of men proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness and evil eye. I've looked at that, wondered if the Lord meant it was just the eye that looked on evil or what people speak of nowadays as the evil eye, witchcraft, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. Mark you, all these evil [00:22:10] things come from within to defile the man. And that was the truth. Because the Lord dealt in nothing but truth and grace. That's what he brought. Having faced the truth, you and I may find ourselves by nature and at last by practice headed up under some of these headings. Perhaps a multiple of the headings fit us. How did he know? Because he didn't need anybody to give any evidence about man, the scripture says, for he knew what was in men. And it was knowing that, [00:23:07] he came to bring grace in such a manner as to arrest and to capture the heart of man. That fountain of all filthiness, the very centre, some say the centre of the affections, the very centre of the man's being. God set his love on you. He wants your heart, not that soiled one. But there is, of course, a process. The scripture speaks of a humble and a contrite heart. The scripture speaks of a broken heart. When you get to that stage before your God, you will find that he has [00:24:10] a remedy. And when David could say, create in me a clean heart, O Lord, God hears a prayer like that, uncleanness that bubbles up in our thoughts is a sign of the kind of people we are by nature.

And if there's any young person finds that they're confronted with difficulties like this, then there is only one person. There is no formula of training. There is only one person that can help you. You go to the Lord Jesus Christ. You confess your sin because you know [00:25:06] that that brought him to Calvary's cross. He loved you. He wanted your heart so much that he broke his own reproach. Has broken my heart. What was the reproach? It was not only the derision that men threw at him. It was the reproach, may I say, that of which he became the object when he took your place in death. And he died saying, reproach. Has broken my heart, the holy son of [00:26:02] God. How about that blinding light? It was the glory of the Lord himself come down. This afternoon we were encouraged and my heart went with it to consider. Now that's an outward movement, isn't it? That's when I look. I look out and I consider and I learn. A wonderful lesson in seven beautiful steps. But I'm sorry that if I had been left to consider, the whole subject of my salvation would have been beyond me. I needed someone who came down where I was. And Saul, who rated [00:27:04] himself as a chief of sinners, he said, the glory of that light. It was a glory of God. It was a glory of Jesus Christ who met him on the road to Damascus and so convinced him because in the power of that light three great things happened. For Saul was convicted as a sinner. And unless you felt the accusing word of the Holy Scripture convict you of sin, my good friend, you're not in the line where God can bless you. Because if we ever live in a day when you need the [00:28:03] qualifications for the job, this is a day. The qualification for God's help and blessing is that you come to him as a sinner. And the one who was convicted as a sinner was converted. He turned in his tracks. The name that he hated because he said to himself it was written over the body of a dead man. This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. And we know where he was buried. But he was confronted by one from whom the answer came, I am Jesus of Nazareth. And it shook the man Saul.

[00:29:04] And in his then condition, God was cutting him off from all his worldly ambitions. God was isolating him from every other man. The folk at his side, they knew something was happening but they didn't hear that conversation. And when you come to your Saviour and know him as your Lord, it's a private transaction. You don't need an intermediary priest. It's a private transaction. And if you see the glory of the Lord by faith, realize who he is, the Son of God who came and stood saying to Saul, I'm Jesus of Nazareth. You thought I was dead. I'm alive at the right hand [00:30:08] of the Majesty on high. What, doing nothing in idle luxury? No, watching you. And Saul, I've come to speak to you. And the man who was convicted as a sinner converted and became holy, shall we say a saint, he was immediately conscripted into service because he was told, some of us went when we were converted, but he was told in words plain what job lay ahead of him. And he spent the rest of his life a conscript. Have you gone through that experience? Have you [00:31:03] ever said, Lord, what shall I do? But let's leave this chapter of Acts and turn to what this great man wrote in Corinthians. He speaks of a glorious gospel, of a glorious gospel. He knew something about glory. He said it was the glory of that light. I couldn't see. What couldn't he see? I think he spent some time when he could see nothing. And some of us as young believers felt that the world had been shattered around us and we hadn't got much light in our own inner beings. But this is a process. And he goes on as he writes to the Corinthians and speaks of a [00:32:08] glorious gospel. So in that fourth chapter that has already been read to us, just a few comments. He speaks in verse 3, if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the God of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. There's an enemy in this world. He seeks to blind. He seeks to blind against the glory of Christ. And if you despise this person who humbly [00:33:01] calls himself Jesus of Nazareth, you're going to lose a very great blessing. Verse 4, I'm sorry, verse 6, for God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness has shined in our hearts. God breaks through. You cannot resist him if he comes like this. And Saul, now called Paul, says that God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, I'd like to talk about

that. I haven't time. You must think about that. The wonder of the light that lights us day and night. While we started there this afternoon about the heavens that declare the glory of God, and that God who has set his [00:34:09] light shining into this world has shined in our hearts. It wasn't that God wanted to blast Saul's ambitions as a man. It wasn't that he wanted to deform him as a natural man in this world. God aimed at his heart and says, the Apostle Paul, with gratitude, with understanding, with feeling, and with a compassion towards the Corinthians, to whom he wrote, and to you and me, to whom this scripture is directed today, that God, that God who caused light to shine out of [00:35:02] darkness, has shined in our hearts to give what? The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The face of Jesus Christ. Peter saw that, didn't he? He saw it shine in kingly glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. Matthew records that that very face was the one on which men spat. Spitting in the face is mentioned in the scripture. There are two significant mentions of it in the scripture. It was argued that this person who's got this terrible complaint is unclean, would be unclean seven days if her father had just spit in her [00:36:01] face. How much more so now, a defiling intention to spit in a person's face. There's another reference, if you chase it, in the scripture. The man who refused to do the work of a redeemer, a kinsman, if you like, he had his face spat on according to Jewish law. He was a man who refused to reestablish his brother's family and to do the work of the kinsman that Boaz did for Ruth. And they spat on the face of my glorious Lord. Now just one closing thought.

[00:37:02] If you go back to a verse we didn't read, that's the 18th verse of the third chapter. We all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the spirit of the Lord. We are all looking on the glory of the Lord with unveiled face. Is this something we're going to do in the future? I believe we will. Spiritually through the scripture and through the fact that God has shined into our hearts and when God's light shines in, darkness flees, there's a cleansing of the precious blood of Jesus Christ which is to the glory of God and the heart that's [00:38:02] cleansed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ made as white as snow. It's a place that God has intended to occupy in your life, their very heart. Now you know that physically this is an important organ. It is the fountain of physical life. I can't explain it but it's used as a picture of that which is the center of the man and that's what God wants. No dark corners, nothing unyielded and when he has shined into our hearts, cleansed us and closed our eyes to this world by the glory of that light of the person of his son, [00:39:07] he doesn't leave us without an object. He gives us someone who's going to engage our thoughts our hearts now and for all eternity, the eternal lover of your soul. That's a heart affair, isn't it? There are some folk and I feel desperately sorry for them, just haven't known what deep long-term human love really is. Those of us that have drunk deep of this wonderful fountain may have some little conception of what it is to be in a heart relationship [00:40:05] with the Lord Jesus Christ with a clean heart filled with the knowledge of the glory of God, that God shined into it and that bright shining light carries in its beam the image of the son of God himself and what does it do? It opens our eyes not to the world around us but to the glories of God, not just the glories of the heavens that he made with his fingers. Isn't this getting a bit nearer to the heart of God who loved you, eternally set his heart upon you and gave the dearest object of his heart to win your heart's [00:41:04] affection and allegiance and so it is your privilege. I wonder if you take it up to with an unveiled face looking on the glory of the Lord with unveiled face to be transformed according to the same image so that the likeness of Christ may not only dawn on my own mind but might be warming my heart, in fact infusing my whole being and forming a likeness in my ways. I wish it was so, so that the image and according [00:42:02] to the same image from glory to glory. Whatever this phrase means it tells me this, that such in a similar way to the fact that John says we've all received grace upon grace, it's infinite. Glory to glory, there's no end. If you've learnt the first lessons, well lesson two is much richer and lesson three is richer still and the inexhaustible

glory of God is what he wants you to see in the face of Jesus Christ, the one who was once so harshly treated and put upon and then I've said lastly, well I must say this, this same apostle speaks about the love of God. You can't think of the glory of God without [00:43:07] thinking of the warmth of that light which is his love, light and love of the theme of Saint John's Gospel. They're so closely together and if there's glory, there's love and he tells us in Romans chapter five, the love of God is shed abroad, where? In our hearts. That very place that was so dark, so black, that was the starting point of every evil influence and wicked thought that bubbled up in my heart and brought me into a position of abject sinnership. Now, through simple faith in Christ Jesus, through conviction, through conversion, [00:44:04] there is the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit that is given us. And there's something else. This is the last, I assure you. Peter speaks of a light that shines in a dark place until the day dawn and the day star arise in your hearts. Where are you looking for the day star? Are you scanning the daily excess to see if what is being said there corresponds to prophecy? That isn't the way. The day star doesn't arise in the daily newspaper. It's the Christian hope. It is the knowledge that the Lord is coming. He's coming soon. [00:45:03] Day is at hand. And just as the light of the glory of God banished the darkness from Saul forever, physically, there's going to be a great change. The Lord Jesus Christ is coming for you. He's coming soon. I'm under strain tonight. I've just come from the graveside of my father in the faith. His last words that I clearly remember, I don't mean his dying words, but at my dining table within the last week, he, within the last month, I correct that, within the last month, he said, as I look out across the world, I see things happening [00:46:04] that show me this, that the glorious appearing of the Lord is near. And if that's near, then his coming for the church is nearer still. And I shall see him soon.

He's with him now. We're moving to a point when the glory of the Lord will burst on this world, banish the dark places, annihilate from this world sin, and he will reign in righteousness and in glory. And as a believer, you've got a part in that. If you've got an interest in heaven, [00:47:01] if that's where your treasure is, the Lord said, there will your heart be also. So may we not take courage that he's taken the trouble as God himself, the God, the one that called light out of darkness to shine into my poor little sin-darkened heart to give the knowledge of the, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And wherever you look on that face, whether it is of the humble Christ or of the exalted man in the glory, the son of man, the son of God, it's a, it's a vision that will blind your eyes to the things of this world and fill your heart with a sense of the treasure [00:48:06] that you have in him eternally.