

Light in the Valley of the Shadow

by George Kulp

The sermon explores the theme of finding hope and light in God during times of affliction and darkness.

Scripture: Psalm 23:4, Isaiah 41:10, Philippians 1:21, 2 Timothy 4:6, Revelation 22:20

Topics: "Faith And Trust", "Gods Sovereignty"

Description

George Kulp preaches about the unwavering faith and peaceful resignation of Mr. Smith during his last affliction, marked by strong conflicts and calm confidence in God. Despite seasons of strong conflict and no extraordinary revelations, Mr. Smith's spirit rested in God's peace, with no doubts about his final safety. His experience showcased a deep trust in God's concern for salvation and a desire to serve Him faithfully, even in the face of illness and uncertainty.

Transcript

"Fear not, for I am with thee."

"The time of my departure is at hand."

"When the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

"Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

So I am watching quietly

Every day,

Whenever the sun shines brightly,

I rise and say,

"Surely it is the shining of His face!"

And look unto the gates of His high place

Beyond the sea;

For I know He is coming shortly

To summon me.

And when a shadow falls across the window

Of my room,

Where I am working my appointed task,

I lift my head to watch the door and ask

If He is come;

And the angel answers sweetly

In my home,

"Only a few more shadows

And He will come."

-- Selected

Mr. Smith's experience, during his last affliction, appears to have been marked by considerable variety. He had no fears of death, no apprehensions of eternity; but he had seasons of strong conflict. Nor was he privileged by those revelations which have often shed unspeakable rapture on the souls of inferior Christians, in the like circumstances. His spirit generally rested with calm confidence in God, and more than this was not necessary either to himself or his friends. None who knew him could entertain any anxiety as to his final safety; and had he, like the venerable Bramwell, been suddenly snatched away, all the mourning for him would have been mingled with "sure and certain hope." In his actual state of mind, however, he was fully alive to whatever aggravations of affliction his circumstances might present; and the anxiety which he felt respecting Lincoln circuit, must be alluded to as one which, it is to be feared, tended materially to increase the virulence of his disease. Some of his appointments were kindly supplied by local preachers; but no arrangements were made by which the claims of the country society could be regularly and permanently met. This was to Mr. Smith a source of continual uneasiness, at a time when it was of the last importance that his mind and body should be kept in a state of perfect quietness.

The following is an extract from a letter written by him to his friend Mr. Herbert, of Nottingham, soon after he terminated his public labors: "May 12, 1831. -- Oh, sir, I did myself and you wrong, in not uttering my thoughts and feelings to you, on the death of your sweet little Anne. My mind was completely thrown to you; it lingered with you. I wept, I prayed for you, and, strange to say, I rejoiced. I said, Well, he has another attraction in Heaven! These strong and pensive feelings gave way to something, which I do not now remember; and what I had fancied a letter never reached you. Forgive me. Defectiveness seems to be a constituent of my character, and mixes itself prominently with my proceedings. Little fineness of spirit comes out of me. . . . What a blessed thing it is to have fast hold of God's concern to save man!"

In the beginning of June, the district meeting was held at Horncastle. It was to be preceded by the missionary anniversary, in the services connected with which, it had been arranged that Mr. Smith should take some part. This, of course, was impracticable, and, without doubt, it would have been prudent for him to avoid every species and degree of excitement. His wish to meet his brethren once more, however, was so strong that he would not absent himself from the district meeting. On Tuesday he went, but was

compelled to return to Lincoln, owing to his ill health. He had taken fresh cold, his cough became violent, and his symptoms were alarming. A consulting physician was called in, who gave some hopes of recovery. To a friend he wrote: "The doctors pronounce me improving, but I am low. When I shall preach again is quite uncertain."

About this time he was seized with violent inflammation of the passages leading to the lungs. The most decisive measures were immediately resorted to. Forty leeches were applied to the chest, and were succeeded by cupping-glasses, and a large blister. These, with the use of calomel internally, produced the desired effect; and Mr. Smith began again slowly to amend.

To his father he thus writes, June 14 -- "I am still ill, but have a turn for the better ... I am in the hands of God; good hands! He is with me, giving me peace and rest of soul, and a hope that is a while I shall make known, with power, His will to the sons of men. I thank you for your prayers." July 1, writing to the same, he says:-- "I am yet on the shelf, -- an awkward place for me; but perhaps it is the best place for me. God knoweth. I wish His will to be done. His will is best. . . . I think our circuit is in a good state, from accounts at our quarterly meeting. Thanks be to God." In reference to his next year's appointment, he remarks: "What God will do with me, I know not, nor am I anxious about it. All will be well." This was Mr. Smith's last letter to his parents.

We do not, at any time, claim for Mr. Smith the praise of prudence respecting his own health: there can be no doubt, indeed, that he was a self-sacrificed man. But there was now no one near him who had friendship enough to lay upon him, in God's name, the strong arm of restraint. When he was at home, he was forbidden even to conduct the family worship. His only chance of life was in being kept perfectly still. Exertion was suicide; and to many of his friends it must ever be a matter of regret, that, at every risk, he was not at this time shut out from all excitement, and compelled to remain in complete retirement. The results soon showed themselves. In his third and last communication to his family from Brighton, he says: "Some time ago, I was looking forward with pleasing anticipation to the time when we should again be placed in a circuit, and I resume my labors. But last week a dreadful bowel complaint seized me, devoured my strength, and reduced me to feebleness itself. It seemed to have subsided, and I fancied health was again springing; but a second slight attack dashed my hopes to the ground. I was so perplexed in my mind respecting my appointment, that, if possible, to get something like satisfaction, I consulted Dr. King, an eminent physician in Brighton. He seems to understand my case well; and he says that there is no chance for the recovery of my health, unless I abstain from all vocal exertion in preaching and praying, and as much as possible in conversation, for at least three months. I am now attending to his prescription, and have already derived some benefit, I think. But I am exceedingly weak. I have communicated these tidings to Mr. Clegg. I expect to sit down. I have requested to be put down for Sheffield, that I may have opportunities of breathing my native air, and consulting Dr. Dawe. I intend leaving Brighton next Tuesday or Wednesday, and, God willing, seeing you at the close of next week. Hanging upon Jesus, and commending you and the children to His sympathy and care, I am," etc.

After resting in Lincoln for a few days, Mr. Smith and his family removed to Sheffield. He bore the journey better than had been anticipated. "When he arrived in Sheffield," says the Rev. Alex. Strachan, "the disease under which he had for some time labored had made a deep impression on his constitution. His friends in Sheffield prevailed upon him to go to his father's house in Cudworth, for the benefit of the country air. I called there to see him, and found him in bed. The keen glance of his eye was gone. The face was paled. 'My dear brother,' said he, 'I have experienced the goodness and severity of God, but in patience I have possessed my soul. You are expected to preach here this evening: may God come with

you! Oh, how I should rejoice to lift up my voice once more in the sanctuary of my God! but you see that I am confined here as His prisoner. Well, God is with me, and I must not complain. The sinners of this village have been much upon my mind, ever since I obtained mercy myself; and wherever I have been stationed they have had an interest in my prayers. The time to favor them is surely come. May many of them receive the message of salvation which you are come to deliver.' After proposing several questions relative to the state both of his body and his mind, to all which he replied with his usual frankness and candor, I prayed with him. In prayer, I expressed strong confidence in the sufficiency of Christ's atonement to justify the ungodly who believe in Him; in the willingness of God to sanctify the unholy who continue in the faith; in the competency of providence and grace to preserve the soul, thus sanctified, 'blameless, unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ;' and concluded with especial reference to his condition. During prayer, he frequently said, 'Glory be to God,' but when I rose from my knees he gave free utterance to the strong and lively feelings he had been suppressing, and was very happy in God."

Mr. Smith's mind at this time seems to have been in a state of delightful tranquillity. He was filled with grateful resignation to God; no murmur escaped his lips. The attentions of his friends he acknowledged with peculiar sweetness, and the whole of his piety exhibited a mellowness and maturity which seemed like the pluming of the angel wing of his spirit for the region into which he was about to enter. The day after his arrival at Cudworth he was especially happy. He said to his friends: "If the Lord has a little more work for me to do, and I think He has, I shall be restored to my family and the church of God;" adding, "What blessed lessons have I learned in this affliction!" The Word of God became increasingly dear to him; his soul seemed to long for its blessed truths, as a parched land for the refreshing shower. The Scriptures, he used to say, were the food of his soul. On one occasion, he expressed himself as peculiarly delighted with the first chapter of St. Peter's First Epistle, which his sister had just read to him. "Oh," he remarked, "the Word of God is such a comfort to me!" Then observing his mother weeping, he said, "Mother, why do you weep? all is right: praise the Lord!" At another time, when in severe suffering, she exhorted him not to be so anxious about recovery, but to yield himself fully into the hands of God. "Bless the Lord!" he replied, "I have done that; I still give myself to Him; He is my portion."

Often in the night -- for he was very wakeful the voice of his thanksgiving sounded sweetly through the house; and many were the seasons of delightful intercourse with Heaven which he and his pious father enjoyed while others slept. His soul dwelt in the repose of love and peace. In his experience there was nothing of the tumult of rapture; there were none of those bursts of ecstatic joy, of which we sometimes hear in such cases. And herein we cannot but recognize the arrangement of Divine wisdom. In the scenes of active life, his principles and labors had often been deemed extravagant. He was now cut off, not only from all external, but also from all internal, excitement. There was nothing to interrupt the calm examination, the sober deliberate testing, of his personal experience, and his methods of exertion in the church. Had his principles been unsound, they now would have certainly failed him. In the severe scrutiny of the hours of sickness, and of ebbing life, when all that tends to warp the judgment is done away, and with no extraordinary revelation of ravishing joy to withdraw his thoughts from the subject, he was qualified, more fully than at any former period, to form a calm and candid opinion of his past life, and to afford, to those who questioned the correctness of his views, the most decisive evidence the nature of the case would admit. But he never wavered, no shade of suspicion that he had been wrong appears ever to have darkened his spirit. On the contrary, he mentioned those opinions and modes of actions in which he had been considered singular as subjects which at this time called forth his special gratitude to God. They had before proved themselves practically beneficial, and they now proved sources of consolation in weakness, in suffering, and in death.

His disease at times was quite flattering, causing him to think a short time would complete his recovery and enable him to get back to his pulpit. His appearance indicated a change; but it was equally evident that the wound his health had received was too deep to be healed in so short a time as he supposed. A friend expressed a doubt as to his ultimate recovery, and asked him how he could reconcile the extreme anxiety which he felt, in reference to the final issue of his affliction, with that perfect submission to the Divine will which he professed to enjoy. He replied: "I have many reasons for wishing to regain my former strength, but none weighs with me so much as a desire to improve the opportunity that would thus be afforded for saving souls." He then remarked on the various methods adopted by the mercy of God to bring sinners to repentance; illustrating these methods by examples that had come within the range of his own observation. He described some of the plans which he himself had employed to revive, extend, and perpetuate religion among the people in the different circuits in which he had traveled; exalting, however, above all prudential means, the ministry of God's Word, and meetings for social prayer. On another occasion he gave a brief narrative of his experience, from the commencement of his Christian profession; from which it appeared that his path had been "as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." He alluded with peculiar emotion to the time of his admission into full connection at the London Conference, in 1822. "It was," he said, "a time never to be forgotten. I look back with great satisfaction to the entire surrender which I then made to God, and which is expressed in the lines:

'Take my soul and body's powers,
Take my memory, mind and will,
All my goods, and all my hours,
All I know, and all I feel,
All I think or speak or do,
Take my heart, but make it new.'

"From that day to this I have been enabled to serve God without fear. Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. On that evening, a remark was made by one of the young men," he continued, "that made a deep impression upon my mind."

Brother Smith, in speaking of the manner of his justification, observed that while wrestling with God for the pardon of sins, he obtained such clear and believing perceptions of the atonement of Christ as constrained him to exclaim, "O God, if all the sins of all the individuals in the world were charged to my account, here is a fountain in which I could wash them all away and in an instant. With these words, the Spirit presented before my mind the atonement of Christ in all its infinitude of merit and efficacy, and filled my soul with the love of God."

A friend relates the following: "While conversing, one day, on the necessity of constant communion with God, in order to our personal happiness and the success of the ministry; the difficulty of discharging, with uniformity and fidelity, the important duties of self-examination and self-denial; and our proneness to luke-warmness and self-deception; I used an expression (inadvertently, of course) which conveyed to his mind the idea that I doubted the sincerity of his motives, and the soundness of his faith. He took no notice of it at the time; but afterwards, while engaged in prayer, I happened to use the same expression, when he rose up, and, with one of those piercing looks which he always assumed when under excitement, said,

'Lord, Thou knowest all things, and Thou knowest that I love Thee. Living and dying, I am Thine. Were I to depart now, I should go to glorious happiness. My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed. I will sing and give praise.' After pausing for a few moments he said, 'My dear brother, as I felt a little drowsy at the time, and heard you indistinctly, it is possible that I misunderstood you.'

"Returning from the country one Sunday evening, I called and found him very feeble, but truly 'in the Spirit on the Lord's day.' We united in prayer and found it good to wait upon the Lord. While engaged in family worship the service was prolonged for some special manifestation of God's love. In a short time our prayers were turned into hallelujahs. It seemed as if we had been suddenly raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; or that the full tide of Heaven's glory was poured forth on our souls. Mr. Smith, mentioning these circumstances when we met, observed that on that night he believed that the sanctifying power of God penetrated every part of his nature, expelled every degree of evil, and filled him with perfect love. .

During this time Mr. Smith wrote to his daughter as follows:

"Sept. 24. My Dear Ellen, -- I invite you to join me in giving warm thanks to the blessed God, for His great kindness to me. This is the third day I have been downstairs, and I am much better today than on either of the preceding [days]. The doctor was here yesterday, and seemed very much pleased with my state. I said, 'Sir, I feel it is life from the dead.' 'Bless the Lord, O my soul!' The Lord has blessed me exceedingly in body and in soul. He has again and again richly baptized me with His blessed and Holy Spirit, and called forth from me songs of thanksgiving. I have had some most delightful seasons in thinking on His adorable name which is a strong tower. I wish to be eminently a minister of the Spirit. Christ says, 'Without Me ye can do nothing.' 'It is the Spirit that quickeneth.' 'Ask and ye shall receive.' I purpose visiting Leeds and Northampton, partly on business, partly for health, and finally that I may meet the saints that our spirits may be refreshed together, that they may see the kindness of the blessed God, to one of the most unworthy, worthless, and unfaithful creatures among the progeny of man; but one who the Triune God is intensely concerned to bless with a present, a free, a full, and everlasting salvation, in sharing in His own ineffable and endless bliss, in His eternal Heaven. Who is a god like unto our God? (None in Heaven, or upon earth;) -- who has set His heart on man, and manifested His intense interest for -- his present, constant, and everlasting happiness, as ought, and must, and will fill angels and men with delightful astonishment, admiration, and gratitude, through endless ages. Glory be to the ever-blessed and Triune God, for ever and for ever! Amen and amen. So says John Smith, from the very bottom of his heart, which is warm with universal love, love to God and universal man. It is the deep and strong, and, he trusts and hopes, will be the constant and lasting wish of his heart, to get and diffuse as much of God in the world as he can. Who is sufficient for these things? No one, but the man whom God fits for the business. But nothing is too hard for the omnipotent God, who has promised to be with them that seek to promote His glory upon earth. I will try for one, by the help of God. My trust is in a promise-keeping God, whom I wish to adore and worship through endless ages .

Later Mr. Smith's state grew worse, and they sent for his wife. He knew her, and said, "This is what I have wished to see," and then relapsed into a stupor, and it was nearly a week before he was again fully conscious. He then expressed some anxiety about the children, and begged Mrs. Smith not to protract her stay. On the day following, therefore, she returned to Sheffield. During nearly the whole of his delirium, he imagined himself occupied in the duties which he had so much loved. He was almost constantly engaged in preaching, praying, or praising God. One morning, after having been delirious during the night, he began to sing with extraordinary sweetness. He had always been remarkable for the taste and music of

his singing; but never before had it sounded so rich and melodious. Both the words and tune were unknown to those who heard them; and it seemed as if he were preparing to assume his place in the chorus of a world of peerless and immortal harmony.

Before this time, he had had strong conflicts "with principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world." On one occasion, he requested that he might be left alone for some time. When his father returned to the room, he said, "Father, I have had a mighty conflict with the powers of darkness; but, praised be the Lord, He has delivered me. I have come off 'more than conqueror,' through the blood of the Lamb." He then broke forth in an animated strain of praise. But it was now, while his physical powers were oppressed with fierce disease, and his mind generally was weak and wandering, that the foe was permitted to make the most terrific and the last attack. Yet, though fever raged in his veins, and his body was tossed and writhed in frenzy, his soul was enabled to collect its energies for the shock, and, as nearly as could be recollected, he thus addressed his spiritual assailant:

"Thou art a devil! How thou didst become one, I do not know; but God did not create thee so. The blessed God cannot be the author of evil. God made thee an angel of light! Thou didst not keep thy first estate! Thou didst become a devil; but how I do not know; but thou art a devil now! It pleased the blessed God to create man a happy creature, and place him in paradise; and thou hadst the impudence to go to paradise and tempt our first parents to sin against the blessed God. They hearkened to thy suggestions, and disobeyed the command of God, -- fell into transgression, and brought down the curse of God upon themselves and their posterity. It pleased the blessed God to send His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for the sin of man. And I am John Smith, was born of pious parents, who brought me up in the fear of the Lord. But I was a bad lad, was led captive by thee, and loved my sins. I caused my parents much grief, they prayed mightily to God in my behalf, with many tears. It pleased the blessed God to connect His Holy Spirit with me, to convince me I was a miserable sinner on the road to Hell, and under His curse. I resolved through grace to leave my sins. I prayed the Lord, and He heard me, and was pleased to forgive my past sins, for the sake of Christ and to put His love in my heart, and to give me the witness of His Holy Spirit that I was adopted. And I believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is a Divine Person, equal with the Father, and that it pleased God to send His Son into the world. And I believe that Jesus Christ became incarnate, and was born of the virgin, that He was a man of sorrow, and acquainted with grief; that He lived three-and-thirty years in this our world; that He died a shameful and accursed death upon the cross; that it pleased the Father to bruise Him for the sin of man; and that He rose again from the dead on the third day. Death had no power to hold Him, and He triumphed over thee and all thy power: and He ascended into Heaven; sat down on the right hand of the father, to make intercession for man; and all power in earth and Heaven is committed into His hands. And I believe that He, by His sufferings and death, made a full and sufficient atonement for the sins of the whole world, and purchased for mankind the Holy Ghost. And I believe that God is pleased, in answer to the intercession of Jesus, to connect the Holy Spirit with every soul of man, with saving purpose and intention, in order to bring them to Christ for salvation. And I believe that there is salvation for all who apply. The blessed God is unwilling that any should perish. And I come by faith to Jesus Christ. I believe that His precious blood avails for me, and I cast my soul upon Him: I rest upon His atonement; and I defy thee, Satan! Thou art a malignant being, the enemy of God and man; and thou art seeking to destroy me; but I defy thee; I commit my soul to Jesus, and I defy thee. Thou can'st not hurt. In the name of Jesus I defy thee, Satan!"

This remarkable contest with his spiritual adversary continued from ten o'clock at night until three in the morning, with loud and distressing cries and tears. Much of the address to Satan, particularly the former

part, was repeated many times; for whenever an interruption occurred, either from without or in his own mind, he recommenced, nor would he cease until he had delivered it throughout in an unbroken form. His voice was strong and his body was violently agitated by the agony of his mind, so that it required five men to hold him in bed. It was distressing to behold him, and to hear him crying many times successively, in the most pathetic tones, "Jesus!" -- Jesus! -- Jesus -- Jesus help!" At length deliverance came, the enemy was overcome, and there is every reason to believe that from this time his heart was uninterruptedly glad in the light of the Divine countenance.

After having spent about six weeks at Cudworth, Mr. Smith was removed to Sheffield. He still entertained the hope of recovery: several of his friends endeavored to cherish a similar expectation, and held a weekly prayer-meeting for the specific object of intercession on this subject. But the decree had gone forth, sanctioned and sealed by infinite wisdom and mercy; and it was irrevocable. Mr. H. Beeson, an attached and kind friend of Mr. Smith, was one of those who watched with him during some of the last nights of his life. In a conversation with Mr. Beeson upon the various orders of intellect, he said of himself, "I am a minister of the Spirit. Soul-saving is my business. God has given me a heart for it. I will go on in His name, and believe for effects." Of his labors in the Lincoln circuit, he remarked, "I was always anxious to get as much business done as possible; so I worked while God was working, and His arm was made bare in many places." He added, "I ought to have given over preaching three months before I did;" and, after some further observations on the same subject, he broke forth, "Hallelujah to the blessed Jesus! I have not had one pain too much, -- not one stroke too heavy. God can do without me."

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