

A PLEASANT EVENING

A SERMON

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“At evening time it shall be light.” Zechariah 14:7

THIS chapter must be understood literally or spiritually, one or the other; and if we understand it literally, and exclude from it a pure spiritual meaning, then the meaning of this chapter will amount to a very little. The severing of the Mount of Olives would not amount to much; a valley being formed there, and access to Jerusalem, would amount to but very little; and a day in which it was neither day nor night, but at evening time it should be light, would not amount to much; and literal waters going out from Jerusalem toward the former and the hinder sea, and the places round about Jerusalem being made level or turned into a plain, would amount to but very little. But if we take the chapter spiritually, then every clause has in it an infinity, and an eternity of significance. Take, for instance, the Saviors words, suppose we took them literally, and suppose that had been done literally, in the sense that the people took it, it would have been certainly a wonderful miracle, but it would not certainly have amounted to much in comparison of his real meaning; I mean when he said, in answer to their question, “What sign show you?” “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” Now suppose he had done so literally, that certainly would have been a display of omnipotent power to destroy that temple, and in three days reinstate it in its former condition; certainly, that would have been something that none but God could do. But then it would have amounted to nothing beyond a mere miracle; we cannot say that any person or persons would have been at all benefited thereby; and the character of the Saviors miracles was to benefit persons, he never wrought a frivolous miracle, he never wrought a miracle for the sake of working a miracle, but always to benefit persons: you will find no exception to this rule. And so, if we take his words spiritually, namely, that he spoke of the temple of his body, that is he spoke of his death and of his resurrection, then look at the his meaning; it embodies all the significance of his wondrous death and his wondrous resurrection. No person before Jesus Christ ever rose from the dead as the resurrection of others, and no person ever will rise from the dead as the resurrection of others; because when he rose that great scripture was virtually fulfilled, “Your dead men shall live; together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, you that dwell in dust; for your dew is as the dew of herbs.” And so, then when we take the Savior’s words in their proper meaning, they have an infinity and an eternity of significance. Oh, how little is the significance of the highest human wisdom, the greatest human wealth, the greatest human acquirement, and the greatest human honor, when set by the side of the significance of the Savior’s death and resurrection. It is

in this divine, this living word, that we read out the eternal thoughts of our Maker; and when favored to read out those thoughts can say with one of old, "How precious are your thoughts unto me, O God; how great is the sum of them." Among the rest our text, for time will not allow me to range over the whole chapter, I must pass by all that, and confine myself chiefly to the language of our text, "At evening time it shall be light." And you will observe that this evening is preceded by a day that is neither clear nor dark, and yet it is a day well-known unto the Lord; but at evening time it shall be light. Now we shall perhaps meet as we go along this morning with a little literalness relative to this text, but as the general rule it must be spiritually understood. What then are we to understand by the evening? for therein lies the nucleus, therein lies the real meaning of the text, therein lies the key, the evening. And I think I shall without any difficulty find four different evenings, or four different circumstances expressed by the evening, all of which are preceded by the kind of day indicated in the preceding clauses' a day neither clear nor dark, a day known unto the Lord; and at each of these days our text is sure to be fulfilled, "At evening time it shall be light." Now they stand thus: First, *The Death of the Lord Jesus Christ*; this is evidently the evening primarily here referred to. Secondly, *The Termination of the Tribulations of the people of God*. Thirdly, *Their Dying Hour*. Fourthly and lastly, *The Judgment Day, which you will perceive to be the evening of the world*.

First. First then, notice primarily evidently the evening here referred to, namely, *The Death of the Lord Jesus Christ*. He died, as you are aware, in that part of the day called by the Jews the evening; and "at evening time it shall be light." Let us see what we can read in the light of this evening. I shall just set this matter forth by the circumstances with which the Lord hath favored us. I cannot bring forward all nor one half of the references made in the Old Testament dispensation unto this evening, this period of time when Christ should achieve the mighty work which he did achieve when he died; suffice it to say then that this great matter was signified by the very time that the Lord came to Adam in the garden of Eden. And let us see there the first declaration; for he came in the cool of the day, in the evening of the day, just about the time of the day that Jesus Christ should die. And I am sure the preceding part was neither clear nor dark with Adam; it was not clear, for he knew not exactly the evil into which he had fallen; and it was not altogether dark, for he was not altogether unconscious that he had fallen into evil, for if he had been unconscious of it, he would not have fled from the presence of the Lord, nor would they have joined fig leaves together to try to hide themselves from that state of sin into which they were brought. So that the day was not clear nor dark. But when the Lord stepped in, and after giving them such instructions and reproofs as the circumstances called for, then came in the evening, then came in that that Jesus Christ was to achieve, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. This seems a very simple declaration, but when we look to other scriptures, we see it is a great declaration; we see that our eternal safety lies in this very matter of Christ bruising the serpent's head; the serpent's head there meaning of course his counsels and his reigning power; and so, we read when he is spoken of as the serpent that the overcoming of Satan was essential to our safety. Hence the Lord in that day shall slay the dragon that is in the sea. And you will observe founded upon this victory of Jesus Christ, and we shall see presently how he did this, founded upon this is the safety and prosperity indicated in the following words, "In that day," when Jesus Christ shall thus by the putting away of sin, when Jesus Christ shall thus destroy Satan, so that Satan will not be able ever again to have any power over us, not as he had in the first Adam; you observe in the first Adam he tore us away, he swerved us from our Maker; but in Christ Jesus Satan cannot do that; Jesus Christ has put away all actual and I had almost said all possible sin; that is to say God the Father for so

all the sin of which the people would be the subjects, and Christ destroyed the whole, and thereby defeated Satan. And hence upon these words stands the declaration, "in that day," when you shall come to know the victory that Christ has wrought, when you shall be brought into harmony with this victory, when you shall be brought to feel if you gain the victory it must be by the blood of the Lamb, when you shall be brought to know this, and brought into harmony with that victory, "In that day sing you unto her, A vineyard of red wine, I the Lord do keep it." Do you not see a contrast here to the first Eden? The Lord put man into the garden of Eden to dress and to keep it; but instead of keeping it he lost it. But here, in this vineyard, in this inheritance by Christ Jesus, is no loss, "I the Lord do keep it;" it is in distinction from its being committed to man, the first Paradise was committed to man, and man was responsible to God for it; and man lost it. The land of Canaan, with its dispensation was committed to men, and men were responsible to God for it. But the salvation of a sinner is not committed to the sinner, and therefore the sinner is not responsible for it. A man is responsible for what is committed to him, not for what is not committed to him. And so, this new covenant vineyard, this new covenant state of things, this result of the Savior's victory, "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment;" notice that, every moment. So that when the Lord takes a sinner in hand to turn that man's soul into a kind of Paradise, the garden of the Lord, and that the water of life shall be in that man as well of water springing up unto everlasting life; now the Lord takes care of it every moment, and there is not a moment night or day in which the Lord does not take care of it; and that is the result of what Christ has done. And "least any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." What sweet expressions are these.

First here is a vineyard to denote peace, for vineyards stand but a very poor chance under the desolations of war; but here is a vineyard to denote peace, that we have peace with God; that he who brought us into hostility with God, namely, Satan, is cast down, and we have peace with God. And the Lord waters it every moment, and least any hurt it, keeps it night and day. And so, at evening time, that is when we get to Christ's victory, then there is light. Ah, you say, I can see how Satan is conquered, he is conquered entirely by what Christ has done; and so if I resist the devil effectually, it must be by faith in the blood of the Lamb, by faith in the victory of Christ. Satan would care nothing for the victory of Christ, if it were not complete; if there were any department in which the Savior was not the victor, in that department Satan would easily conquer us. But there is no department in which he is not the victor, and therefore he has bruised the serpents head, he has destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil. And thus, Adam by his sinning brought in a dark and cloudy day; but the living God brought this victory in, and "at evening time it was light." Here then, supposing Adam was supernaturally thus enlightened, and became a believer in Jesus Christ, he would get rid of all his darkness, overcome Satan, and see that prepared for him there was everlasting light. So that "at evening time it shall be light." Hence you that are Christians, you must go on pleading the victory that Christ has wrought. If your conscience and Satan say to you, Ah, you are overcome here, and there, and pretty well everywhere, what a poor creature you are; your answer must be, Jesus Christ was overcome nowhere, and I will plead the completeness of his victory. The devil may laugh at me, but he cannot laugh at Jesus Christ, and if I have no confidence in self or in the creature, I have confidence in Jesus Christ; he was conquered nowhere, his victory is complete.

And this victory is as suited in the order of it as it is in the character of it. Hence said the church of old, Thanks be to God, that offered us the victory? No. Thanks be to God that wished us to have the victory? No. Thanks be to God that gave us a chance of having the victory? No. Thanks be to

God that gave us so many days, and told us that if within the limits of those days we gained the victory it is all that he wishes? No; but “Thanks be to God that *gives us* the victory.” He hands the victory over to us, and precious faith receives Jesus Christ in the victory which he has gained. Again, what time of the day (it is all according to Christ’s atonement;) what time of the day did Noah recognize the great truth that the waters were abated, that the curse was gone, that the rainbow of peace was about to appear; that he, Noah, was about to enjoy his liberty? What time of the day was it? Trouble yourself just to turn to the 8th of Genesis, and the 11th verse, and you will find it was about the evening, it was in the evening. “At evening time, it shall be light.” Noah waiting all day. Well, Noah, how are matters with you? Is it quite clear the waters are gone? No: I hope they are. Is it quite dark with you? No, I think the waters are gone I am not quite sure; it is neither light nor dark, but I hope at evening time it will be light. And when evening time came, in came the little dove with the olive leaf plucked off, and then all was light. Ah, he says, the curse is gone, the waters are abated, all is right; I can enjoy my freedom now; I can have the range of the whole world now. And so, my hearer, it is when a poor sinner is brought to see into the judgments of God; he waits, and waits, and waits until the Lord sends some minister with the ministry of peace. The dove perhaps indicating the meekness and lowliness of Jesus Christ, as well as indicating the character of his message, that in the evening time it came with an olive leaf, the olive, the symbol of peace; and then all was light, and all was clear. And so, my hearer, if the tidings of what Jesus Christ has done reach your soul, that he has made peace through the blood of the cross, then by him we are brought into peace. But until we are brought into this peace with God it is neither clear nor dark; that is, if the Lord has begun a work of grace in your heart. If I say, Well, have you peace with God? Well, you say, I am not quite sure upon that, and I am not altogether in the dark about it. I know that Jesus Christ is the way of peace, but I am not sure I have that peace. So, then it is not yet cleared up to me, and yet I am not altogether in the dark: I see that he is the way of peace, and if ever I have peace, it must be by him. Well then, if it be twilight, if he has begun the work in your heart, he who has touched your eyes once, so that you see men now as trees walking, will touch them again, and you shall see every man clearly; by-and-bye the minister of peace shall come, and when the evening time shall come, when the evening sacrifice shall come in in all its perfection, then you will realize the forgiveness of sins in your soul, the love of God in your heart, the peace of God in your conscience, and you will be made happy; Ah, you will say, if this is evening time it is indeed light, for Jesus Christ is the true light. It is the light then of victory entire, and of peace divine and everlasting.

Third, the paschal lamb as you are aware, was to be slain in the evening. Now here in the paschal lamb you have exemption from judgment and entire safety. There is something in that subject that I can think about better than I can speak of; I think it is delightful beyond all expression. Exemption from judgment by the paschal lamb, just look at it. Here is a poor sinner demonized and brutalized, and deserves the very lowest cavern in hell, and the heaviest thunderbolts of heaven, and deserves to be cast into the very center of the lake that burns with fire and brimstone; yet God wakens that sinner to a knowledge of his state, gives him confidence in Jesus Christ, in that spotless Lamb, and his blood exempts that man entirely from judgment. And the worst was as safe as the best; there was none so good that he needed not the Paschal lamb, and there was none too bad for the Paschal lamb not exempt. There was the Paschal lamb and the blood sprinkled, it was to be slain in the evening; all pointing out the blessed truth of Christ as the evening sacrifice. Here then again, we have light in the evening. The angel passed over Egypt: well, what has the angel done? Has he committed one error? Not one. Has he slain one Israelite? No. And why did the angel abstain from

the Israelites? Was it because they were not sinners? Was it on that ground? Some of them had been just as bad as any of the Egyptians. What then was the reason that he abstained? There was but one reason? The blood was there, that was God's appointment. Ah, my hearer, do not think, do not allow the enemy, if you can help it, to persuade you that I am this morning speaking to highly of Jesus Christ, for he is a Jesus Christ that deserves all this to be said of him, and infinitely more. He has bruised the serpent's head, he has made peace; he is the way of escape, and there is no case too bad for him. Now again, apply the words here: go to an Israelite, a poor sinner that can hardly persuade himself that he is one that will be passed by. Well, what do you think? The angel of death has not ministered the judgment yet. No. Well, what will become of you? You ask the Israelite that has sprinkled the blood. Well, I do not know, it is not clear yet, for although I have sprinkled the blood, that is, I believe in Jesus Christ, that his blood cleanses from all sin, yet I am afraid my faith is not real; and it is not altogether clear how matters will be with me, and it is not altogether dark, I have a hope I may escape, but I am afraid. So, it is neither clear nor dark, but it is a day known unto the Lord; and by-and-by, when the angel is gone, when the evening comes in the angel is gone, then go to the Israelite, and say, How is it now? Quite clear now: there is no more judgment to minister, the judgment is ministered, and I am exempted from that judgment. So then "at evening time it shall be light." And so, my hearer, the Lord Jesus Christ endured all that was to be endured, he gave all the obedience that the law required, and he is all that sacrifice for sin that sin can ever require, and there remains no more sacrifice for sin. Here also at evening time it was light; keeping to the idea, that the evening here means the death of Jesus Christ, see how nicely it answers to it all. Let him be the conqueror, let him be our peace, and let him be the Paschal lamb by whom we are exempted from judgment, for there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. Once more before I come to the day of the Savior's death. When Daniel was praying, the angel came and said, "I am come to give you skill and understanding." I venture to say that not only philosophers, politicians, commercial man, scientific men, and clever men, but 9/10 of professors, if left to interpret what the angel means by giving Daniel skill and understanding, and, they would be beside the mark, they would not explain it in the way that accords with its meaning. Now in what way do you think that skill consisted of? In what think you did that understanding consist? He has come to make a skillful man of him, that is to make him skillful in the word of righteousness, in the Word of God, in the mysteries of eternity; to give him such an understanding as should make him skillful in these things. How think you was it done? "He," Christ Jesus, there it is, "shall finish transgression, he shall make an end of sin, he shall make reconciliation for iniquity, and shall bring in everlasting righteousness, and shall shut up vision and prophecy," completed and shut it up from the Jewish nation and from all those whom the Lord is not intend shall understand it. "I think you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, So it seemed good in your sight." And so it is, that no man is a skillful man, or handles the word skillfully, that is unacquainted with Jesus Christ with what Jesus Christ has done. But that man is brought to feel so much of his sinner-ship as to find hope and salvation nowhere but in what Jesus Christ is done, as described in the ninth of Daniel, the righteousness that he has brought in, namely everlasting righteousness, that is a skillful man in the word that understands this matter. And hence you will find that the apostle Paul in his epistle to the Hebrews, reminding us of those that are unskillful in the word of righteousness, and that they are babes; and in what consisted their unskillfulness, and their infancy of mind in these things? Why, it was that they did not rightly understand the perfection of the priesthood of the great Melchizedek; he had many things to say relative to Melchizedek to illustrate this perfection of the work of Christ, but they were dull of hearing, they

were not yet sufficiently acquainted with their own hearts, nor with the majesty of God's law, nor with their own weakness and wretchedness to pay so much attention to this great matter of Christ's eternal priesthood as the apostle would wish them to pay to it, and so he reckoned them as babes, and reckoned them dull of hearing, because they did not enter into the beauty and glory of the eternal priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus then, in these cases, "at evening time it shall be light," all centering in the death of Jesus Christ. Let us keep close to that; that is the key that unlocks everything.

What the Lord said to Joshua literally will be true of you spiritually if you keep close to this point. The Lord said to Joshua, "There shall no man be able to stand before you," that is, you shall conquer all that you meet that oppose you; and so you will if you are brought into the enjoyment and understanding of this work of Jesus Christ, the victory he has wrought, the peace he has established, the exemption from judgment that is by his blood, the righteousness he has brought in, if you are brought here you are a conqueror, there is not a thing can overcome you; no; that is your daily armor, your daily victory, your daily life; you cannot be overcome, the warfare is accomplished, the day of battle is over, the evening is come, the spoil is being divided, and we have to sit down and celebrate on every heavenly hill the triumphs of our king, and rejoice that whatever clouds precede the manifestation of his perfect work, now that that perfect work is clearly revealed there is not a cloud to be seen; no, bless the Lord, it is the evening in the morning which is the first day, and here we have skies without a cloud, here we have day without any darkness. As hell has no day, so heaven has no night; the one has no light, the other has no darkness; the one has no pain, the other has no pleasure; the one has no ease, the other has everlasting repose.

But we come to the day of the Savior's death. There was darkness over the earth, as you are aware, from the sixth to the ninth hour. And think you that there is no significance in that darkness? I would not be fanciful upon these solemn meaning of all the belief realize the meaning of matters, but I never could get my mind away from the idea, that the darkness on the day of the Savior's death, indicates, in the first place, the presence of our sins, that our sins were there. Our sins are spoken of as a thick cloud, and our sins were there. And that it indicates also the presence of the law, for the law was ministered at Sinai in darkness, there was a darkness about it, and that it indicates the presence of death. And how long did this darkness last? Until the ninth hour, until Jesus said, "It is finished," bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. There was no more darkness, no more sin, no more wrath, no more curse; there was no more death, death is swallowed up in victory. So that here, literally, at the evening time it was light. Thus then, if we read out our text in the atonement of Jesus Christ, pointing to the evening time in which he died, there we realize the fulfillment of the promise, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head;" here we realize the meaning of the olive leaf and the dove; here we realize the ultimate meaning of the Paschal lamb, exempting the Israelites from judgment. Here we realize the ultimate meaning of the testimony of Daniel in his ninth chapter of what Jesus Christ has done; and thus at evening time, that is evening time, meaning Christ's work, in the completeness of it, as I have described, "at evening time it shall be light."

Second. But this evening signifies, secondly, *the termination of the tribulation of the people of God*. We have our days of trouble; but all the troubles of the people of God must then, as our text declares; "At evening time it shall be light." Matters not what they may be, whether like Jonah in the whale's belly, he has his day there, but in the evening of that day shall be what? Condemnation?

No! No! Jonah was brought while in the whale's belly, as it appears, (reading his book,) to confess that "Salvation is of the Lord." So, the end of his trouble was salvation. And like the other Israelites, and here we might set before you some very solemn contrasts by asking the question, that while it says, "At evening time it shall be light," the question is, with whom shall it be light? Here comes the end of the trouble of the Israelites; here is the cloud to light up their path, the day of the tribulation is ended, the evening is come, the light shines, but with whom was it light? Why, with those that believed in God's word, and sided with God; for it was not light with the others, it was darkness with Pharaoh and his host, as it was, to go back farther, with the whole world, when the end of the day of Noah's trouble came, it was light with him but darkness with the others. So, the cities of the plain, and of a great many other circumstances we might name, that while the end of the day was darkness and destruction to the one, it was salvation to the other. If you are one with Christ in what he has done, then no fatal trouble will ever befall you, there is not a trouble that will ever befall you, that you will not get over; and all these things you will be more than conqueror through him that loved you. There is not a thing that can conquer you: it must first conquer Jesus Christ, it must conquer the counsels of God, it must conquer Omnipotence itself before you can be conquered; it is God that swears by himself that in blessing he will bless. He has his way in the whirlwind, and you cannot have yours: you may be whirled about a great deal more than you like; you may go up to heaven, and down again into the depths, stagger like a drunkard, and driven to your wits end, cannot have your way. But what of that? The victory lies not in your having your way, but in God having his way, "He has his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet." So that all our tribulations shall terminate, and "afterward," as the apostle says, coming to the same point in meaning, but under a different representation, "it yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby." And no Christian ever suffered in any age or ever will, that is not all the better for it, sure to end in light. Why, the church of old, they thought, well, here we are, by the rivers of Babylon sat down, our harps are hung upon the willows, and they that carried us away, require from us mirth, mocking us and saying, now where is your God, where is your Zion now? Where are you now? Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? But by-and-by the Lord stepped in, cut in sunder the bars of iron, broke in pieces the gates of brass, brought his poor helpless people triumphantly out, and then, when the Lord thus turned her captivity said they, "We were like them that dream our mouth was fulfilled with laughter, and our tongue with singing," they said among the heathen, the Lord has done great things for them; well, so he has, we will not deny that, whereof we are glad. "At evening time, it shall be light." Ah, my hearer, if you can take your stand under the shadow of the cross, if you can take your stand under the tree of life, if you can take your stand upon the immovable rock of what Christ has done, you will prove to be a victor, you will prove to be unconquerable.

Third. Third, *in a dying hour*, "at evening time it shall be light." Now here may appear an exception, because some seem to die in the dark; some of the Lord's people die in the darkness of discomfort, but no one ever did or ever will die in the darkness of ignorance or enmity. I have seen a great many in my time, in a dying hour, and I have seen the sovereignty of God there as well as while we are living. And though the Christian says, I seem to have no light, no enjoyment, I want the presence of the Lord. Well, are you ignorant of what Christ has done? No. I believe in him, and I love him, and I have no other hope. And that is all the experience that some of the Lord's people have when they die, and yet "it is light." They can see the way, they have not so much enjoyment as they could wish; but "it is light!" And the darkness can last but a little while, unless

we can believe that old wives fable that the Catholics themselves are, some of them, half ashamed of, namely, that when the soul leaves the body, it goes into some sort of purgatory, or limbo, in the face of God's word which declares, that "Absent from the body is present with the Lord:" that the angels escort the soul from the body to Abraham's bosom. The dear Redeemer stood and received the departing spirit of Stephen. And yet these imprudent, daring blasphemers, tell us that the soul goes to purgatory. I believe the Pope, and all that are one with him will not merely go to purgatory, but to a place beyond that. Well, I have no patience with such daring blasphemy. I think we are too mealy-mouthed, I think if we bore testimony openly enough, some of these poor dupes would come and hear us, and perhaps learn better; but we are afraid of injuring our respectability and good name by bearing that testimony against error that we ought to bear. (The Bible says, "The righteous is bold as a lion!") Where is our boldness gone to? I hardly know!) "Absent from the body, present with the Lord," Bless the Lord for it!

Fourth. And then, lastly, *The evening of the world*. At the judgment day then it shall be light, the evening of the world. I have nothing to do on the judgment day with my sins; I shall not see one of them, I shall not hear one of them; not one of these dogs will be there to move his tongue against the children of Israel. My soul will be in heaven, and I shall know when the Lord is coming, because I shall be with him, shall come with him, and he will raise the body in the twinkling of an eye, "At evening time it shall be light."