

Darkness & Antithesis

Darkness as in evil and as the antithesis of light and good

There are three subjects where the idea of darkness is presented most compellingly. A tremendous work of beauty, art and darkness, such as Rembrandt produced in his later life, has taken hold, especially in



modern times, of our appreciation and awe. The light in some of his paintings comes out best because of the heaviness of darkness and shadow. And the way he most appropriately presents a focus of light causes the excellent beauty to penetrate deeply into the heart. Then, too, dark romanticism as in the literature of Nathaniel Hawthorne is also excellent art. Its literary art with both a somber tone and a turning to morality in the various faces of hidden guilt burns and penetrates the heart. Maybe not so lofty as these two forms of artistry is the entertainment in Film Noir. It also, like these, has compelling qualities. Here the heavy wrong of persons

toward society is woven into fate and destiny. The film noir stories could not have come about except because of the somber picture of humankind presented in the disillusionment that fell upon the people of those days in the second world war where more than sixty million people perished.

Darkness or mystery in Christ's teaching and the obliquity brought about by doubts concerning him

Christ's words are often hard to understand and he so often spoke in parables that could not be understood unless he explained them. However, the difficulties in Christ's instructions and parables can often be cleared up by looking at them in context. The parable of the invitation to a wedding feast followed by its refusal and thus given to others (the poor and the lame in the highways and byways) means simply this. Christ came first to those at the center of religion, those who were the focus of religious teaching. Most of them refused Christ and his teaching and so Christ brought his revelation of God to the poor, lame, blind, demon-possessed and diseased. Many of these believed in him and entered his kingdom. The dark paradox in Christ's teaching, "Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted," speaks of the exceeding joy his relatively few followers had at the time they saw him after his resurrection. Overall, there are still the many who refuse to believe the Gospel and its moral teaching and are left in the obliquity of moral deviation, falsehood and misunderstanding. Ultimately there is a step even further as it pertains to the greatest antithesis of good as is seen in the personifications of evil. But also, there can be seen a place where evil at its worst makes good worth even more.

The Parable of the Sycamine Tree

Lk. 17

And the apostles said to the Lord: increase our faith. And the Lord said: if you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, and should say unto this sycamine tree, pluck yourself up by the roots, and plant yourself in the sea: he should obey you.

The apostles (our greatest examples of faith come from them) did not see the matter of faith so well on this occasion. They wanted more faith to have more power over the troubles they encountered in their ministry. They wanted more of the power that they saw in Christ. But Jesus replied that even the smallest amount of actual faith has power even beyond what they wanted. Such a small amount of faith, like a tiny mustard grain that can barely be seen, has vast power. I have read that the sycamine tree is what may be known as a mulberry fig tree. All these are natural elements: tiny seed, sycamore or fig tree, planting and the sea. A tree being moved and planted in the sea is not natural. This is the remarkableness of the parable.

Almost totally this modern age of our world is about nature and what is natural. Matters such as faith and religion and God are diminished. There is power in atheism to move society. All knowledge and authority are leveraged by what can be seen and reasoned from it. This leads to darkness. Sometimes, rather than sight, other senses are of greater value to know an object. Sometimes a little bit, a small measure, gives more sensitivity and thus the ability to know. Too much credit is given to knowing by seeing.

For an age in which not believing in God is so prominent it is fitting that the universe should be about 13.8 billion years. The conflict with reason here is apparent. Science is a trial and error and knowledge by proof study as it is so often presented. Yet the things that happened in history, even a few hundred years ago, cannot always be well understood. And such a vast time as several billion years is way beyond testing for proof. Then to draw a conclusion that the world and universe came about without being created thus implying that there is no God is a false method. The conclusions of science are out of bounds where they have influence whether to believe in God or not. It is utterly impossible to reinforce unbelief in God by anything that can be conceived of happening during such an enormous amount of passing time. If science enters the spiritual arena let it examine the spirituality in Christ. That was only two thousand years ago. And those who record his life were eye witnesses. In Christ and his teaching is the way of knowing God in truth, not in the obscurity of billions of years.

For a method that depends so much on sight as science it presents the statement that most of the universe is unknown in substance as well as power. Dark matter and dark energy and black holes are ideas that express how much is unknown in these modern times. Within all this vast unknown there is lots and lots of room for a little faith in God.

To the apostles and followers of Christ, God was known as the God of heaven and earth and the sea and all that is in them. Nature was not all in all for them, nor for Christ. "Man cannot live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you."

Again, in Christ's parable of the sycamine tree all the elements (the tiny seed, the fig tree, the planting and the sea) are natural but the objective is not practical. "Say the word and the tree will be planted in the sea." A tree planted in the sea is of no use. The issue is one that is not of this world. But that is where the important issues are. As the Apostle Paul quotes, "God in whom we have life, breath and being."

The sea is a part of nature that involves much theologically. When God delivered the children of Israel it was by parting the sea. In the stormy sea, Jesus spoke and said, "Peace, be still." Jesus walked on the sea. When Jesus called Peter and Andrew, James and John they were making their living on the sea. The

sea involves such spiritual matters as deliverance, salvation and commitment. Think of other ways Christ also uses the fig tree and mustard seed in his life and teaching. They too are important in spiritual events.

God created the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In God alone only good is possible. In his creation, though it is far removed from God, evil is possible. God confronted this issue when he placed the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the garden of Eden. Evil, with the temptation of the serpent, became sin and transgression. The surely die that God spoke of came then. The serpent said, "God does know, that your eyes will be opened and you will be like God knowing good and evil." We should look carefully at the "surely die" and the "God knowing good and evil." Surely die has many parts. Shame and hiding from God is foremost. Thus, Adam and Eve and their children make a barrier to the presence of God. The first death was a fraternal homicide. Surely die means the worst kind of death. Surely die means massive death. The entire population of the world was destroyed except Noah and his family who had God's favor for their righteousness' sake. Surely die means hideous evil. Fraternal slavery where brother sells brother into slavery. The oppression and slavery of a nation is also included. The atrocity of civil war and brother fighting against brother is another form of surely die. War on a powerful white charger with death, famine and pestilence on powerful steeds following is another. And yet still, there is even worse that surely die involves. As Jesus described, "Where their worm dies not (that is, the decomposing of the body worm) and the flame never goes out (that is in hell.)" God spoke true when he said "Surely die."

The devil in the serpent said, "Like God knowing good and evil." In the scriptures knowing something often means being a part of it, knowing through experience. Yes, God knows evil, it was a part of his innocent suffering and his experience of unjustly being crucified. Every time before when evil came into a person's life Satan never stretched out his hand farther than he could draw it back if he needed to. When it came to Christ dying evil went too far. As God said, "If you transgress you will surely die," so he meant, "if you obey you will surely live," even as Christ perfectly obeyed God's will. So, death, universal to all people, sought for Christ to die. This brought on the demise to death and sin. When Christ without sin who should be without death died then God broke death and sin that went too far. This is the only way death and sin could be broken. When death came to God incarnate, God's only begotten Son, death was turned into resurrection where death and sin will be no more. These are the issues that Christ was teaching about.

God's word brought about creation. Jesus is the Word. Jesus taught his apostles, "if you have a tiny amount of faith you will say to this sycamine tree be uprooted and plant yourself in the sea and it will be so." Did the apostles learn from this teaching? Yes.

Peter and John went up together into the temple at the ninth hour of prayer. And there was a certain man lame from his mother's womb, whom they brought and laid at the gate of the temple called beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple. Which same when he saw Peter and John, that they would enter into the temple, desired to receive an alms. And Peter fastened his eyes on him with John and said: look on us. And he gave heed unto them, trusting to receive something of them. Then said Peter: Silver and gold have I none, such as I have, give I you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up. And immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he sprang, stood and also walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping and glorifying God. (Acts 3)

While we are alive we may yet be dead in sin. This is the part of surely die where there is kept a barrier between us and God. Satan, the prince of this world and the Antichrist, is the author of this kind of darkness, disbelief and unspirituality. Is there any Hope? Yes. God asked Ezekiel, "What do you see?" He said, "I see a valley of dried bones." God asked Ezekiel, "Can these bones yet live?" And Ezekiel replied, "You know, God." God said, "Prophecy to the bones and say, 'Bones hear the word of God.'" And in Ezekiel's prophecy as God told him to say the bones took on flesh and God breathed life into them. This is resurrection and this is our Hope. This is the tremendous power of a little tiny bit of faith.