



The Dark Mile
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***Psalms 139:7-12 KJV** Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? [8] If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. [9] If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; [10] Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. [11] If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. [12] Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.*

***Psalms 139:11-12 MOFFATT'S** If I say, "The dark will screen me, night will hide me in its curtains," [12] yet darkness is not dark to thee, the night is clear as daylight.*

I. PSALM 139

- There are some biblical scholars who believe that David wrote this particular psalm during a time of deep disappointment in his life. But we get to that in a moment.
 - **Israel at this point in time:**
 - Has been united under the leadership of the shepherd-king, David.
 - Foes are no longer troubling them and if they do so choose to go against Israel, great armies are able to defeat them.
 - It is a time of stable national security and welfare.
 - The internal strife that is present from the leadership of Saul has been put to rest.
- David starts to contemplate the goodness of God and all that He has done for him both personally and for his own family. Such a state of heart will often put us in the mindset of longing to do something for God. It is a good feeling to have and these are time times that inspiration seems to flow at its highest crest in our lives.
- During this time of thoughtful leanings toward God, David starts considering who this great God really is. David had written psalms and songs about Him. He had exalted Him in worship but it quickly occurs to David that God's place of dwelling is far lacking as to what it really ought to be. David observes that his house is one of cedars and God's house is one of curtains (1 Chronicles 17:1).
- David is living in a grand home and yet in startling contrast, God is still confined to the tent of the Tabernacle. David gives himself to a dream of building the Lord a more permanent and grand Temple. But this dream is bigger than he is and so he seeks out the prophet, Nathan, and includes him in on the plan.
- Nathan hears out David and encourages him to do it (1 Chron. 17:2). But there is something that transpires during the night. Nathan, being the prophet, finds a voice of the Lord to come to him during the night. That voice of the Lord (1 Chon. 17:3-15) give Nathan a clear directive that even those this grand and noble desire was in the heart of David, it was not to be. He could not build the Temple. In fact, his son would build the Temple.
- Nathan, on the next day reports back to David the very disconcerting news of the reversal and tells him, "You cannot build the Temple." David's response shows the depth of man that he is. You can read about in 1 Chronicles 17 and 2 Samuel 7. He gives an assurance to God that even though greatly disappointed, he will take God at his Word.
- There are times in life when God teaches us more from his denials than from His permissions. Just because God denies us of a thing in our lives does not mean that we have disappointed God nor are we out of His will. It just means that God knows more about our destiny and future than we do. Often the denials are the very things that will preserve us in the future.
- History is full of examples of where that God seemingly smothered a good idea or something that seemed to be great vision to men. It would be in the later years that God would reveal to David why he could not build the Temple. But for now, he just had to trust God in His refusal.

- Has something like this ever happened to you? You determined to do something great in life or for God and the prevailing circumstances stopped you in your tracks. I can recall more than one or two times in my own life that I was filled with some great vision of accomplishment or desire and God seemingly closed the door to what I was longing to achieve and pursue.
 - I have friends who wanted to be missionaries and God said “No!”
 - I have friends who wanted to be pastors and God said, “No!”
 - I have friends who wanted to get an inside track to a particular ministry and God said “No!”
 - I know people who determined to get involved in some particular career track and God said “No!”
 - I know people who were moving in the direction of something held dear to them and some circumstance beyond their control stopped them and God said, “No!”
 - I know people who got involved in some very noble and righteous causes that ground to a halt and God said, “No!”
 - I know people who desperately wanted healing (and needed it) and God said, “No!”
 - I know people who prayed many prayers and fasting and God said, “No!”
- J. C. Ryle -- Of all the doctrines of the Bible, none is so offensive to human nature as the doctrine of God’s sovereignty.
- I sometimes look to the Bible and see the reactions of the characters and realize how weak and spiritually immature that I am. You could run through the gamut of characters from Noah, to Abraham, to Job, to David, to the prophets, the apostles, and the minor characters that Paul mentions in the salutations of his epistles and see how much they gave for their God.
- David with deep disappointment gave himself to worship and from that experience biblical scholars say that Psalm 139 poured out of him during this time. Instead of giving himself to anger, or mistrust, or doubting, or even pouting, David gives himself to worship and the majesty of the God-exalting Psalm 139.
- How you react to the directions of the prophet or how we react to the times God says, “No!” makes all the difference in the world. I call it having to walk the “dark mile.”

II. THE DARK MILE

A. Richard Hutton’s Story of the “Dark Mile”

- Richard Hutton told of an account when he was in Scotland traveling a number of years ago. He arrived at one place that was literally loaded with lakes and he found a very attractive little inn situated on one of the shorelines. After having spent a very relaxed evening at this little inn, they took up their travels the next morning.
- Hutton asked the innkeeper where the most beautiful lake in Scotland was and the innkeeper told him that it was Lake Lochy. He explained that it was only about four miles away and then he traced a path for them on their map. The route that he traced was meandering and somewhat out of the way, at least from the appearances this is what Hutton surmised.
- So he asked the innkeeper, “Is this the only way to get to it?” The innkeeper told him that there was another way but no one ever went that way by choice. The path ran through a very deep gorge and was commonly called “the dark mile.” This intrigued Hutton who asked how the path had come to such a name. The innkeeper told him that it was exactly what the name implied. It was dark, gloomy, and frightening. There are huge overhanging ledges of rock that drip water all the time. The path is just a slippery thread and the growth along it is very stunted and pale. The “dark mile” has its share of dangers and is very foreboding.
- Hutton and his fellow traveler left the inn and had not gone too far down the road when Hutton turned to his friend and asked him if he was game to try the “dark mile.” Being the adventuresome sort, his friend gave him the thumbs up and they descended into the deep gorge. They had not travelled very far when Hutton pointed straight up and much to his surprise he was able to pick out a few stars in the sky. He remembered the old line, “when it is dark enough, you can see the stars.”
- They picked their way carefully along the treacherous path and suddenly they came out of the mouth of the gorge and the mountains that gave backdrop to Lake Lochy literally took their breath. It was a never to be forgotten site in either of the men who were hiking the “dark mile.” Hutton said that his friend said, “I don’t believe that we would ever have appreciated the beauty of Lake Lochy if we hadn’t traveled ‘The

Dark Mile.’”

- That night at another small inn in Scotland, Hutton wrote in his journal three statements that shaped some thoughts for me about this message:
 - Nobody travels “The Dark Mile” by choice.
 - When it’s dark enough, you can see the stars.
 - We never would have appreciated the beauty of the Lake if we had not travelled “The Dark Mile.”
 - *Charles Spurgeon -- Stars may be seen from the bottom of a deep well, when they cannot be discerned from the top of a mountain. So are many things learned in adversity which a prosperous man only dreams of.*
 - *Charles Spurgeon -- The Lord gets His best soldiers out of the highlands of affliction.*
- **1. The Dark Mile Is Not Travelled by Choice.**
 - It was not a question of sin in David’s life at this point. His ideal was really motivated by a right heart with God. He longed to do something magnificent for God. The choice of building the Temple was what David wanted.
 - But dark miles are not travelled by choice. We are pressed into its path by disappointment not disobedience. We walk the dark miles so that God can often redirect us into something that will be greater for His purpose.
 - How many people have you met over the years who had mapped out their entire lives and it did not occur the way they had in mind. Sometimes the devil would love for you to be overwhelmed by guilt and the ineffectiveness that is created by it.
 - Have you ever considered that this is exactly the direction that God wanted you’re life to go from the outset?
- **2. When it’s dark enough, you see the stars in the Dark Mile.**
 - Thoughts on the Dark Mile:
 - First, nobody travels “The Dark Mile” by choice.
 - Secondly, when it’s dark enough, you can see the stars.
 - Let me help you with a secret, everybody is not called to build Temples. God calls every one of us to do things that are unique to our own lives and we can get into serious spiritual dilemmas when we try to do something that someone else is supposed to do.
 - When you begin to just read through 2 Samuel 7, you notice that David becomes thankful for the simple things that God has given to him. Whether the dreams are fulfilled or not, I have much to be thankful for.
 - David spent the rest of his life gathering material for Solomon to build the Temple. This is how you invest your life when God tells you “No!” You begin to see it as an opportunity to gather resources to build the hearts of others.
 - **Treasures -- Martha Snell Nicholson**

*One by one He took them from me,
All the things I valued most,
Until I was empty-handed;
very glittering toy was lost.*

*And I walked earth’s highways, grieving,
In my rags and poverty.
Till I heard His voice inviting,
“Lift those empty hands to Me!”*

*So I held my hands toward Heaven,
And He filled them with a store
Of His own transcendent riches
Till they could contain no more.
And at last I comprehended
With my stupid mind and dull,
That God COULD not pour His riches
Into hands already full!*

- There are a lot of stars we can see in the dark mile if we give ourselves to that vision. God's refusals are loaded with immeasurable possibilities of blessing. So before you allow yourself to be ruled with resentment, it would be very advantageous to look for the blessing in the "No!"
 - **3. We see more beauty by travelling the Dark Mile.**
 - First, nobody travels "The Dark Mile" by choice.
 - Secondly, when it's dark enough, you can see the stars.
 - Thirdly, we see more beauty by travelling the Dark Mile.
 - David would have more dark miles to travel before he died. He would watch his sons and daughters get involved in all sorts of desperate situations. He would have his kingship to be attempted to be overthrown in a political coup. Some of his closest confidants would turn on him but he had the heart of a man after God's own heart.
 - Over and over his worship pours out in the Psalms. Of the 150 Psalms, 75 are attributed to having been written by David.
 - One of the great tragedies of life is that we can live a trivial life and get away with it. Pain and burdens oftentimes are an advantage that forces us to break through the superficial crusts to discover life of a much deeper level.
 - A whole lot of life can be wasted worrying with the "No!" that God places in front of us and always be casting about looking for something else bigger, better and faster.
 - Thomas Aquinas told a story of a man who heard about a very special ox and determined to have it for his own. He travelled all over the country and spent a fortune looking for this special ox. At last, just moments before he had consumed his life, he realized he had been riding it all the time.
 - Most people have everything they need even in the most difficult of situations if we would but just accept that God has us exactly where He wants us to be.
- Romans 11:33-36 KJV O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! [34] For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? [35] Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? [36] For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

III. CONCLUSION -- THE JOY OF CONTENTMENT

Present Tense -- John Lehman

*It was spring, but it was summer I wanted,
 The warm days, and the great outdoors.
 It was summer, but it was fall I wanted,
 The colorful leaves, and the cool, dry air.
 It was fall, but it was winter I wanted,
 The beautiful snow, and the joy of the holiday season.
 It was winter, but it was spring I wanted,
 The warmth and the blossoming of nature.
 I was a child, but it was adulthood I wanted.
 The freedom, and the respect.
 I was 20, but it was 30 I wanted,
 To be mature, and sophisticated.
 I was middle-aged, but it was 20 I wanted,
 The youth, and the free spirit.
 I was retired, but it was middle-age I wanted,
 The presence of mind, without limitations.
 My life was over.
 But I never got what I wanted. . . .*

- I plead with you to do everything within your power to understand contentment and not to curse the dark miles of your life. Instead of avenues of despair they are pathways toward power.

- Some of you have heard of Randy Alcorn. There is a story behind his life when he had to walk the Dark Mile. It came in January 1989. Knowing that it would greatly complicate his pastoral ministry, he began to participate in non-violent and peaceful, civil disobedience by picketing abortion clinics in Portland, Oregon.
- He went to jail for a few days and had to endure the humiliation at the hands of the guards and even the clinic nurse who did not believe he was a diabetic. Finally when she was convinced that he was, she came by the cell and threw some syringes and a vial of insulin at him.
- Another time, he went to court and a judge ordered his hands and feet to be shackled in chains. Then he had to walk down the sidewalk in front of a bank of cameras. He was humiliated on the local network news and the front pages of newspapers all across the nation.
- The abortion clinic sued him and Alcorn decided that to keep from paying the money he was receiving as a salary from the church that he would resign. He did this at the threat of garnishment of his wages. He then determined he would work for minimum wage so that his income would not be taken. To this day this continues. None of the books that he has written has benefited him monetarily. None of the honorariums he receives at conferences goes to him. All of the money above minimum wage has gone into support pro-life causes and overseas missions.
- The greatest challenge he spoke of had to do with his own children. They would be heavily criticized at school because of his involvement in the pro-life movement. They witnessed in the courtroom battles how that many of the supporters of the pro-life movement were misrepresented and had to endure false accusations. But through all of the persecution, Alcorn said he found a God he did not really know existed. It was the persecution and the calamities of life that brought out to him the joys of walking the “dark mile.”
- I wonder how many times that we have cursed the “dark mile” when God was really wanting us to see the blessings and joys of what it would do to elevate us in our walk with Him.