



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Ian Hamilton

Isaiah 50: 4-11

Spring 2024

"When All the Lights Go Out"

TRANSCRIPT

Introduction by Dan Duncan:

Well, good morning. It is 9:30, and it is my privilege to introduce our guest speaker this morning. Some of you will remember Eric Alexander, who I believe was here three times in the early 2000s, and we enjoyed his ministry very much. Well, we have one of his 'mentees', or 'one of the men that he trained' when Ian was a young man. And so I want to introduce Dr. Ian Hamilton, and also his wife, Joan is with us as well. Last night I was talking with Ian, and he told me that "she is the best part of me." So we're glad she's here with us.

They live in Inverness, Scotland. But Dr. Hamilton, it seems, is not there as much as probably he'd like to be, for he is a busy man. He is president of Westminster Presbyterian Theological Seminary in New Castle, England. He is also Adjunct Professor at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina, as well as a trustee with The Banner of Truth Trust.

He has traveled to America many times. I can't remember the number of times, 40 times I think, and ... 70? Ok 77 times, and in Texas at least four times. So, we're glad to have him here. This is his first time at Believer's Chapel, and as I said, we are very happy to have Ian with us. He's Dr. Ian Hamilton, but he likes to be called 'Ian'.

So, Ian, welcome!

Message by Dr. Ian Hamilton:

I often tell people you have a choice: You call me, 'Ian', or, 'The King of Scotland.' [Laughter]. But you don't like having a king. —You rebelled against our king, didn't you? And look where you are now.

Well, it is a privilege for me to be here. Joan and I love coming to the USA. We've been in Oklahoma for two or three days. First time ever in that state; and that's state number 33. And the folks there were just wonderful to us—kind, open hearted; it was a privilege to be in Oklahoma. And no less so to be here this morning in Believer's Chapel in Dallas.

Please turn with me in the Word of God to the prophesy of Isaiah. You might call it Isaiah, [eye-s-eye-ah], but we'll call it Isaiah. Chapter 50; we'll read from verse 4 to verse 11. Let me just quickly set the context for you. This is the third of the four *servant songs* in Isaiah. The first one in chapter 42, the second one in 49, and of course, the final one, chapter 52, verse 13 through to the end of chapter 53.

And in these four *servant songs*, the Lord God is giving us a developing, escalating portrait of the servant who would come to crush the head of the serpent and bring salvation to the people of God. And what is striking about the four *servant songs* is the developing suffering that this servant of the LORD, (who would be the faithful servant Son that Adam failed to be)...and what is so striking is the escalating sufferings that would necessarily belong to the life, and ministry, and mission of this servant, whom Yahweh, the covenant God, would send into the world in the fullness of time to bring salvation to the world, and especially to all who put their hope and trust in Jesus Christ. So here is the servant Himself speaking;

⁴ The Lord GOD has given me
the tongue of those who are taught,

that I may know how to sustain with a word

him who is weary.

Morning by morning he awakens;

he awakens my ear

to hear as those who are taught.

⁵ The Lord GOD has opened my ear,

and I was not rebellious;

I turned not backward.

⁶ I gave my back to those who strike,

and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard;

I hid not my face

from disgrace and spitting.

⁷ But the Lord GOD helps me;

therefore I have not been disgraced;

therefore I have set my face like a flint,

and I know that I shall not be put to shame.

⁸ He who vindicates me is near.

Who will contend with me?

Let us stand up together.

Who is my adversary?

Let him come near to me.

⁹ Behold, the Lord GOD helps me;

who will declare me guilty?

Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment;

the moth will eat them up.

¹⁰ Who among you fears the LORD

and obeys the voice of his servant?

Let him who walks in darkness

and has no light

trust in the name of the LORD

and rely on his God.

¹¹ Behold, all you who kindle a fire,
who equip yourselves with burning torches!

Walk by the light of your fire,
and by the torches that you have kindled!

This you have from my hand:
you shall lie down in torment.

Isaiah 50: 4-11 (ESV)

I'd like us to think about what we read in the tenth verse:

¹⁰ Who among you fears the LORD
and obeys the voice of his servant?
Let him who walks in darkness
and has no light
trust in the name of the LORD
and rely on his God.

What are God's people to do when all the lights go out—when all they have is darkness?

When I was a young Christian believer, I encountered well-meaning believers who would say to me, 'Ian, you must have 'this experience' in order to rescue you from mediocrity, and trial, and trouble, and discouragement. You need 'this experience' to lift you above the ordinariness of Christian discipleship, so that you can live a life of untroubled joy and peace.' It was called 'the normal' Christian life.

But the more I read the Scriptures as a young believer, the more I realized that the normal Christian life was not a life that was free from trial, and trouble, and

suffering, and discouragement, and heartbreak—because the Man of faith, the Son of God in our flesh, was not excused trial, and tribulation, and trouble, and discouragement.

In the second servant song in Isaiah 49, verse 4, the servant of the LORD, the Son of God incarnate spoke these words; 'My life has amounted to nothing. It's a waste of space.' I sometimes say to my students when I'm teaching, "Who in the Bible said this? 'My life has amounted to nothing. It's a waste of space.' " 'Well', they say, 'well, was it Job?' I say, "No, it wasn't Job." And they'll give me this answer and that answer. No one has yet said to me, "I know who said that. It was the sinless Son of God in our flesh who said, 'My life has amounted to nothing. It's become a waste of space.' "

Now this is the Servant of the LORD, sinlessly expressing His sense of bewilderment and darkness that is increasingly overcoming, and ultimately overwhelming His holy humanity. Indeed, if the Lord Jesus Christ in our flesh could not have said that, He could not have become our Savior. He would have been a superman and not a true man, to stand before God in our place and for our sake.

So when you look at the landscape of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, you don't see a life that is untouched by trial, and trouble, and suffering, and tribulation. Think of some of the great statements that shine out from the Gospels—the holy sinless frustration of the Son of God: "O you of little faith." (Mat 6:30), "How long have I to bear with you?" (Mat 17:17). You can almost sense the holy, sinless frustration in the Son of God as He beholds, even in His own disciples, unbelief, and doubts, and fears.

What we see in this tenth verse is a truth that we always need to take to heart, and not least if we are young believers. We need to realize that authentic, living, saving faith in Jesus Christ is a faith that may know dark, deep experiences that leave them bewildered, crying out, 'LORD, where are you? Where are you?'

That's one reason why Christian believers should be well acquainted with the Book of Psalms. I think it's one of the great sadnesses to see in Gospel churches how unacquainted God's people are with the Book of Psalms.

Do you know that 59 of the 150 Psalms are laments? 40 percent of the songbook of the Lord Jesus Christ are laments. "How long, O LORD?" "Where are you, LORD?" "Why is this happening, O LORD?" "Darkness has overwhelmed me."; think of Psalm 18. If we didn't have the Book of Psalms to sing, and to read, and to ponder, we would have a profoundly unbiblical understanding of the life of faith.

Let me quickly set the context of this passage to you. Isaiah is speaking prophetically. He's looking forward, as it were, down the tunnel of history to 120, 130 years in the future, when God would come, and through the Babylonian empire overwhelm His covenant people, Israel, according to His promises back in Deuteronomy 28, (as you will know).

Israel is heading for cataclysmic judgment: Because of its unbelief, its covenant rebellion, its disobedience, God has warned them through His prophets—but now the approaching cataclysm is coming ever closer. And it's into the midst of that prospect of judgment that God, through Isaiah, gives His people hope. He wants them to know that the cataclysm of judgment will not be His last word because He has a Servant, ready and waiting:

A Servant Son who will be what Adam failed to be,
who will fulfill all righteousness,
who will give to God perfect obedience,
who will be obedient even unto death, even the death of a cross,
who will stand before God as the covenant head of a new humanity,
who will live the life we could never live,
who will die the sin atoning death we could never die,
and thereby, through His covenant faithfulness and obedience unto death, He
will secure salvation for a multitude no man can number.

And it's in the midst of that, that in this third servant's song, the LORD speaks through His Servant to the believing remnant and says this, "Who among you fears the LORD...?" (vs10). And that is one of the great biblical descriptors of a true believer.

Some people say, 'Oh, 'the fear of the LORD', is that not Old Covenant language?' Not at all; think of 1 Peter chapter 2, is at verse 17, where Peter speaks about what true believers are. He says they are those who, "Honor the emperor.", (a staggering statement), who, "Fear God.", who, "Love the brotherhood." So he's speaking to those who are savingly connected to Yahweh:

"Who among you fears the LORD
and obeys the voice of His servant?
Let him who walks in darkness
and have no light
trust in the name of the LORD
and rely on His God." (vs10).

Let me draw out three truths from these words. Number *one*: Darkness is the inevitable experience of a faithful child of God. You cannot be an authentic believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and not experience seasons of darkness, and trial, and trouble, and tribulation in your life. Why is that? Because faith unites you to Jesus Christ. And you remember the Lord's words in John 15, isn't it from verse 18, 'If the world has hated Me, know this, it will hate you also. Why? Because you belong to Me.'

Those who have come to a saving trust in Jesus Christ are the children of God in the midst of a world that lies in the evil one. They are children of light in a world shrouded in darkness. They are sons and daughters of the truth in a world overwhelmed and enshrouded with lies.

Now you'll notice here that the "*darkness*" is not a darkness caused by the believer's sins. (Now there are times, aren't there, when because of our sins, our disobediences, our willfulnesses, that the LORD graciously ... notice the language ...

graciously withdraws from us the sense of His presence, and leaves us to reap in measure the consequences of our sins, and He does so that we might be awakened and return to Him.) But here, the *darkness* is not the result of sin, it's simply the result of feeling the LORD and obeying the voice of His servant. And what the LORD is saying to the remnant is, 'The darkness, the spiritual darkness that you are experiencing, is because of your faithfulness, not your unfaithfulness.'

Increasingly I think, this may be in your country as it is increasingly becoming in my country, a reality. We have been shielded for five centuries because of Reformation truth from the cost of faithfulness to the Savior. But now, the legacy of 500 years of Gospel truth is being eroded rapidly on all sides: Evil is called good. Good is called evil. And simply to be faithful to Jesus Christ as the only Savior of the world leaves you facing the opprobrium of the world—the hostility of the world, the exclusion of the world. The world 'cancels' you if you're a true-hearted believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so we need to reckon with the reality of the life of faith.

People need to know that when they come to Jesus Christ, yes, He's going to grant them pardon, and abundant life, and the hope of glory...but you know, every time someone approached Jesus with the intention of following Him, Jesus would say to them, 'If you're going to follow me, take up your cross and follow me.' (Luk 9:23).

Now we've domesticated that language: We say, 'Well you know, he's got a cross to bear...he's got a nagging wife.' Or, 'She's got a cross to bear. She's got a lazy husband.' Or, 'They've got a cross to bear. Their children are difficult.'

That's not what Jesus was saying. He was saying to would be disciples, 'If you're going to follow Me...are you ready to die? And are you ready to die an excruciating death? Take up your cross.'

Imagine someone came to your door tonight and said, "I hear you're a Christian. You attend Believer's Chapel. I know it's a place where the Word of God is loved and the Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed. Please tell me, what do I need to know to belong to Jesus Christ and be saved eternally?" And you set them down; you give them a cup of coffee and you say to them, "Are you ready to die?" "

Well, no!—But that's where Jesus begins.

Now, of course, there is the assumption that they've come to know something about Him, so that they can say, 'Yes please, God will see you later in the next service; He is worthy of my all.' There is a cost to belonging to the One whom this world despised and rejected. Is the servant greater than the master?

The *second* thing: It isn't just that darkness is the inevitable experience of true-hearted believers, but the *overwhelming* darkness may well be the experience of faithful believers. What are we to do when all the lights go out?

Now I would reckon that all of us here this morning have been through seasons of darkness to a greater or lessor extent. We understand and measure what it is to feel the absence or the presence of the LORD. We know what it is to go through seasons of doubts, and fears, and hesitations. But maybe there are one or two here who, in the mysterious providence of God, have had to go through times when all the lights go out. I cannot imagine what that must be like...not a 'pinprick of light' in your believing cosmos.

I had a friend, who's now in heaven, who once said to me, "Ian, I used to envy the lampposts in Glasgow because they had light." He envied concrete lampposts because they had light, because there was a time in his life when all the lights had gone out, when Satan seemed to be the only reality in his life.

"God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform." (*Cowper*). God's ways are so beyond our ways, so much higher than our thoughts, that His ways with us leave us gasping. Remember Job at the end of Job 42, isn't it? He just said, 'I'm putting my hand to my mouth. I've got nothing else to say. Let God be God.'

And one day, when we 'no longer see through a glass darkly', one day, when 'face to face' the LORD sets us down and says, 'Beloved child, let Me now tell you why I was pleased to allow thick darkness to overwhelm you.' And we will listen and we'll say, 'You did all things well.'

But at the time we're left bewildered. We're not believers because we've got answers for everything, are we? We're believers because the Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me.

And as we'll see in a moment, there was one man for whom every pinprick of light in the cosmos went out—when the Lord Jesus Christ was made sin for us; and He who knew no sin, He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

All the comforts were gone; all the assurances were gone. There was no voice from heaven to say, 'This is My beloved Him, with Him I'm well pleased.' The heavens were as brass—thick darkness covered the soul. "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

And we'll see in a moment, that's one of the greatest comforts a child of God can ever have. We have a Savior who knows what it is to have all the lights to go out, who understands the darkness that we may experience because of our faithfulness to the Lord—who understands it because He's been there. His understanding is not the understanding of divine omniscience, (though it includes that, surely) it's the understanding of human experience. He has been where we are; He has stood where we stand.

The Bible's very up front, isn't it? You want to belong to the Lord God, to the Son of God, the Savior of sinners?...then you need to know that this may well be experiences that will touch your life and that will leave you bewildered.

That's why we need to run from people who offer us quick fixes, and superficial experiences that will lift us out of the darkness and place us in the heights, because we have a Savior for whom the darkness was not excused. He is the Man of faith, whose life was unblemished in His trust in the heavenly Father; and yet, He experienced darkness.

But the *third* thing to notice, (and this is really what I want to say this morning), 'What are we to do when all the lights go out, or when most of the lights go out? What are we to do?'

We're to ***trust in the name of the LORD***, and rely on our God. Maybe it's because I'm getting a little older, (but I hope it's not that), but the more I think about the Christian life, the more I realize everything rests on this: 'What do I believe about God?'

What do I believe about God? The most significant thing about you and about me is what you believe about God. That's the most significant thing about you. And here, the response of the antidote to 'walking in the darkness and having no light', (vs10b), is to, "trust in the name of the LORD..." (vs10c). Well, 'What is the name of the LORD?'

God's name is all that God is. Who is He? He is *Yahweh*, "I Am who I Am".

He is the ultimate being.

He is the God who spared not His only Son, but who delivered Him up for us all.

He is the God who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.

He is the God who is full of grace, who is rich in mercy.

Remember that great moment in the Book of Exodus chapter 33, (vs18), isn't it, where Moses pleads with God, "Show me Your glory." "Show me Your glory."

And then, chapter 34 begins and the LORD places Moses in the cleft of the rock, and the LORD causes all His goodness to pass before him. And then the LORD speaks. (It's one of the climactic moments in biblical, redemptive revelation.), The LORD speaks. What does the LORD say? 'Moses, you want to see My glory? Listen to this, Moses: "The LORD, the LORD", (that's a very Hebraic way of saying, 'This is so significant, Moses, I'm underlining it'). "The LORD, the LORD, rich in mercy, full of covenant love, slow to anger." Yes, He will by no means clear the guilty, but look where He begins: 'Get this about Me, Moses. If you get anything about Me, get this; "The LORD, the LORD, rich in mercy." '

And that's what the writer is saying to us here:

'When darkness seems to veil His face, I rest on His unchanging grace. (vs2).

When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay.'(vs3).

(From My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less)

That's why the biblical doctrine of God needs to always be front and center in our services of worship. That's why our praise needs to be radically God centered.

Some of you probably ... maybe you can tell me ... how many of you have heard Alistair Begg's rant, his four minute rant on contemporary worship? Now I know Alistair; we're friends; we're good friends. He goes to some church in California. Alistair ... he's very funny. He's naturally very funny. (I'm nothing like Alistair. We're brought up in the same area of Glasgow, he and Sinclair Ferguson and Eric Alexander, and myself, all brought up within three miles of each other—but we didn't know each other.) And Alistair says, "You know, you go to church, and I went, and the band struck up, and...(that's not his thing, and certainly not mine)...and then this individual comes on the scene and says, "How are you all?" Well, that just leaves Alistair in the stratosphere. "How am I? I'm miserable, and I'm downbeat. I've kicked the dog, and I haven't got a dog." *[Laughter]*

And he said, "Why doesn't he tell me about God?" He says, "Tell me about,
'Praise my soul, the King of Heaven,
To His feet thy tribute bring.
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
Who like thee His praise should sing.
Praise Him, praise Him!' "

Your doctrine of God will shape everything about you. That's why we need to be steeped in the Scriptures. And in our worship, follow the rich revelation, self-revelation of God that He is the Triune God.

You know, in the early hymnology of the church, (I'm getting a bit off piece here, but this is important). I teach, amongst other things, I teach ancient church history and theology. It's where I'm the most out of my depth; yet it is what I most enjoy doing.

In the first six centuries I've never come across one hymn that isn't radically Trinitarian. There's not one hymn to Jesus, not one hymn to the Holy Spirit. (Now don't misunderstand me. I think we should be singing to Jesus, and we should be singing to the Holy Spirit. Absolutely. God is God.) But they were so connected to the Triunity, of the unity of God so much so that it overwhelmed them—the doctrine of the Trinity. Read John Calvin and his absolute delight in Gregory of Nazianzen in Book One of *The Institutes*, (Book One, XIII. 17.), 'The doctrine of God':

The omniscience of God,
The omnipotence of God,
The aseity of God,
The self-being of God,
The grace of God,
The goodness of God,
The loving-kindness of God.

Trust in the name of the LORD. —And we need to know that name. We need to be exploring, LORD's day by LORD's day, day by day, in our own readings: 'God, what are you teaching me about Yourself?'

You see, we read the Bible too often to find ourselves. And of course we want to be blessed—but we *first* come to the Scriptures to say, "LORD, show me Thy glory. Tell me about Yourself."

Trust in the name of the LORD—and rely on God...not because you get answers for everything, but because you know the God who has. That's why we're to 'live by faith and not by sight.'

"When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay. (vs3), (*My Hope is Built on Nothing Less*)

And then, the final verse just briefly, and then I'll try and draw it together. The servant looks to those, 'who are kindling their own fires', (vs11), who are, 'looking for

light within themselves', we might say—those who are not looking to God but to human resources and human means.

All you who kindle a fire,
who equip yourselves with burning torches!
(Well if you),
Walk by the light of your (*own*) fire,
and by the torches that you have kindled!
This you will have from my hand:
You'll lie down in torment.' (vs11)

He's really saying there are two ways to live. You can live your life trusting in the name of the LORD—or you can live your life equipping yourselves with your own torches, navigating your own way through the trials and the tribulations of life, excluding God in all your thoughts—but ultimately you'll lie down in torment...and you'll be cast out from the presence of the LORD. There are two ways to live.

So let me conclude just by trying to see this comment in the light of the Holy Trinity. The *first* obvious thing is this: The Lord Jesus Christ knows your darkness because He's been in darknesses infinitely more dark than your darkness will ever be. He knows our frame—He remembers that we are dust. How does He remember? Because He is dust. There is dust, glorified dust on the throne of heaven; and the only marred body in glory is that of the Lamb in the midst of the throne.

He knows your darkness from the inside; and that's why the writer to the Hebrews can say, 'Let us therefore come with boldness to the throne of grace, for we don't have a high priest who is untouched by the feelings of our infirmities. But we have a high priest who can sympathize with us, who has a fellow-feeling with us, who knows our frame from within, and is able to give grace to help in time of need.' (Heb 4: 14-16). Not 'clinical help', not simply 'divine' help—but holy, sinless, glorified humanity help from the God-man.

But then *secondly*, the Holy Spirit helps us as we experience the trials, and the troubles, and the tribulations of life. One of the great verses for me in the Bible is Romans 8:26, "The Spirit *helps* us in our weakness. "

I was saying to someone yesterday, the word, "*helps*" in that text in Greek has 17 letters. And we translate it, "helps". Prosaic, isn't it? 17 letters. Well, what this *sunantilambanomai*? It's a double Greek compound, 'sewn together' with us, the Spirit helps us, but '*anti*', —He's 'over against us'. You say, "Well, is that a bit odd? How can He be *with us* and yet be, *over against us*?"

Ah! Go and think; for here's a question, (*to answer*). I could tell you, but it'd be better for you, if later this afternoon you think, "Right. What's that word again? 'Sun...' something? Let's look it up in the dictionary; "*sunantilambanomai*" How can the Spirit be, *together with us, to help us*—and yet, '*anti*', *be apart from us*? Go figure...homework for this afternoon.

But the great thing is: 'He helps us; we'll do it together.' 'We'll get through it together.' You see, we're never passive in the life of faith. We never, 'Let go and let God.'

But then, *thirdly*, not only does Jesus *know*, not only does the Spirit *help*, but the Father Himself *loves you*! Those are great words, aren't they, in John 16:27. Jesus is comforting His disciples. He's about to leave them; they're bewildered—how can they face life without Him? And He says, remember in John 14, (vs16), 'I will send another *Comforter*, another *paraklétos*, one to come alongside you.'

Then He says these great words of John 16:27, "The Father Himself loves you." And what He's saying to His disciples is, 'How ever dark the days to come may be, hold on to this: "The Father loves Me." "The Father loves Me." The Father loves Me.' (Jn 10:17).

Ten times in Matthew chapter 6, Jesus says to His disciples, "Your Father", "Your Father", "Your Father." There are more references to God as the 'Father of His people' in Matthew 6 than there are in the whole of the Old Testament. And that God was the

Father of His people; just as the Spirit indwelt His people; but, there is a new revelation of the Fatherhood of God with the coming of the Son of God. And what Jesus wants His disciples to know is, 'That when all the lights go out, or when even some of your lights go out, and darkness seems to veil His face, rest on this: "The Father loves Me."

"The Father loves Me." "The Father loves Me."

So, let him who walks in darkness and who has no light, 'Trust in the name of the Lord; I can rely upon His God. Let us pray.

(Closing prayer) Our Father, we bless You, that in Christ You have loved us with an everlasting love, with a love that will never let us go. We thank You, LORD, that though our faith at times is very frail and fragile, our hope and trust, that that confidence does not rest in our faith, but on the object of our faith—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. LORD, encourage our hearts; remember us for good, we pray, and all whom we love. And we ask it in our Savior's name. Amen.

(End of Audio)