

AT THE GRAY DAWN.

(By Rev. S. D. Gordon)

(From Keeping Tryst)

It is of intense interest to trace out how frequently God chose the early morning hour for giving special blessing to men. Let us look at a few of these. The pivotal experience of Jacob at Jabbok is related in the thirty-second chapter of Genesis. Twenty years before he was forced to flee from home because of his contemptible treatment of his brother Esau. Now he is returning and greatly disturbed to hear of the approach of Esau with four hundred men to meet him. Skilfully he arranges his large company of attendants, and his numerous herds, sending a present to pacify his brother, and, finally, after night has come down, sends his family over the stream, while he remains behind.

And now, while alone in the darkness, he is taken unawares by a stranger suddenly coming upon him, seizing him, and attempting to throw him down. Not unlikely Jacob's guilty conscience imagines this to be some emissary of Esau, sent to attack him. But Jacob is a strong man and a skilful krestler, and as that strange wrestling match goes on hour after hour in the darkness he proves himself fully equal to his opponent. But now a very strange incident occurs. When the stranger found that he prevailed not, he disengages one hand and touches lightly the inner side of Jacob's thigh—a vital point in a wrestler. And instantly Jacob is startled beyond measure to find that in response to that slight touch the strength has left his thigh and his power as a wrestler is gone! How much must have packed itself into a few moments of time just then, as thought after thought flashes after other with lightning speed. The first thought must have been: "This cannot be merely a man!—no man has such strange power as this being has just used—this must be God—and I have been fighting God!—"

Then comes so swiftly and vividly the vision of his past life, a constant fighting of God's plan, and insisting upon his own all those years; depending upon his own scheming and unmanly cunning in his determination to succeed instead of patiently letting God work out His own plan. With what utter shame and humiliation it all comes rushing in upon him. And yet God has patiently borne with him even in all that, and is now at his side. What patience! Some such swiftly passing thoughts crowd thick and fast upon him in a moment's time. Instantly he throws his arms around this One by his side and begins to cling, and plead for forgiveness and blessing. It is no longer wrestling Jacob, but clinging Jacob. And as he clings and pleads (the very attitude of heart God was longing to find him in), just as the day was breaking his request is granted, and he receives not only a new name but a new creature as well. That was the most memorable hour in Jacob's whole life: the point of turning from Jacobing—supplanting—sneaking up behind to trip up (as his name literally means)—to a new life of trusting and of prevailing against men by prevailing with God. Mark the fact that it was at the

"breaking of the day" that this greatest blessing of his life came to Jacob. God could have given it earlier in the night, had He so preferred, for He chose the hour. No one studying Jacob's life up to this time could suppose that he had been in the habit of keeping the morning watch appointment with God before that eventful dawn, but who can doubt that that for the remaining years the dawning hour would be regarded as the most sacred of the day to him, and probably found him preparing to keep tryst with his wondrous Lover-Friend.

The final deliverance of Israel from the iron furnace of Egypt is told in very simple language in the fourteenth chapter of Exodus. It furnishes the startling climax to that strange series of events by which this new nation's freedom was secured. The remarkable deliverance then wrought was commemorated in the first of the great national songs, and is continually referred to throughout the Hebrew books as the greatest event in the Hebrew history. Note that it was God who chose the hour of deliverance, and note also what hour it was. "It came to pass, in the morning watch, that the Lord looked forth upon the host of the Egyptians." Would not the memories of that hour make it a hallowed one to those men?

Turn now to Moses' experience in the thirty-third and thirty-fourth chapters of Exodus. It marks a new stage in his life up to a higher level than he had yet touched. He had been pleading that the nation might be forgiven for their great sin, and that prayer is granted. And the moral gravitation of their sin is kept back from working out the natural result. Then he pleads that God Himself would continue to go with them and personally lead them as He had been doing, and finally, that prayer, too, is granted. Greatly emboldened by God's graciousness, and fascinated to know such a God more intimately, he breaks out with a third great request, this time for himself, "Show me, I pray Thee, Thy glory." And God answers that prayer by naming a time when He would meet Moses on nearer terms than even he had yet known. Mark the significant choice; "Be ready by the morning and come up in the morning unto Mount Sinai and present thyself to Me on the top of the mount." Did Moses keep appointment with God? Nothing could have prevailed to keep him away. "And Moses rose early in the morning and went up," and had such a glimpse of God's glory that he stayed there a long time, and when he came down to mingle again with men the glory-light of that Presence was seen in his shining face though he was wholly unconscious of it.

Ah! if more of us would keep the morning appointment with God, there would be found many more faces with the beautifying peace of God illumining every feature and revealing plainly a close contact with Himself.

Mark Elijah's experience in the crisis of his life. (I. Kings xix). Thoroughly disheartened in spirit, and physically worn by his splendid work on Carmel, he turned his face toward the mount of God, and after forty days' weary tramping "he came thither unto a cave and lodged all night

there." And after refreshing sleep the Lord's voice is heard, calling him by name, and in the early hours of that new day Elijah receives a completely new transformation conception of God, who makes himself known to this man of rock, and fire, and thunder, not in the rock-rending whirlwind, nor in the upheaving earthquake, nor in the awful lightning flashes, but in a strangely sweet, penetrating "sound of gentle stillness."

What a flashlight surprise that must have been to this fiery man, revealing a tenderness and compassion in his God to which he had been a stranger, and melting his very soul. With heart hushed, and spirit awed, and face wrapped up from view, he stands forth to listen. Sometimes we experience more in a moment than in years. Life is not measured by years, but by experience. Such a moment must that have been to Elijah. And God chose the time for so revealing Himself, and His choice was the early morning hour.

Shall we leave the older part of the Word, and turn for a moment to the later leaves of revelation?

In John, twentieth chapter, is given the incident of the meeting, on the resurrection morning, of Jesus and the woman who had such reason for loving Jesus passionately—Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome, came also "at the rising of the sun," to anoint his body with spices. This Mary seems in her love and grief unable to await the time of appointment with her sister-friends, but "cometh early, while it is yet dark," and finds to her consternation that the body is not there. But while John and Peter, who have also come, examine the tomb and go away, she remains "standing without at the tomb weeping." And as she continues weeping, she sees a man standing on one side, and with her tear-blinded eyes supposing Him to be the gardener says, with sidewise glance, "If thou hast borne him, hence tell where thou hast laid him and I will take Him away." No thought of naming the one she was speaking of. There was only one "Him" to her. The supposed gardener utters one word—"Mary." Instantly she turns full around to Him. Only one person's lips could repeat that name with those tones that thrilled her through and through. Just one word bursts from her lips in her native Aramaic, "Rabboni"—"Oh, my Master." Note that it was the Master who chose the early morning hour to reveal Himself to the grief-stricken Mary. And she is not the only one to whom He has revealed Himself in the morning hour, as many a true tryster can tell.

The very next chapter of John, the twenty-first, tells a like story. Seven of the disciples, bitterly disappointed, thoroughly discouraged, are talking together about their faded dreams and dashed hopes. Peter, ever ready to propose something, says that he is going back again to the old occupation—fishing. They all agree to go with him. But it's a fruitless night's work. Discouraged men never succeed at anything. "But when day was now breaking" they notice in the dim dawn-light someone standing on the

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