

"LIGHTS IN THE WORLD."

Rev. Joseph H. Smith.

Our text is from Philippians, 2nd chapter, the last clause of the 15th verse, "Ye shine as lights in the world."

Our message this morning is God's word with respect to our relation with the world. Therefore, at the outset let me remark and remind you, this being the case, that we are put and placed with reference to our lighting the world, and we should not be so surprised to find a good bit of darkness around us. I don't see what need there would be of a light there if it were not pretty dark. "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation among whom ye shine as lights in the world." This will serve to accent and emphasize and perhaps to elucidate what comes in the verse just before "Do all things without murmurings or disputings."

Has it ever occurred to you to listen and to analyze closely the intonations and the possible spirit of much of the complaint we make or of the talk we indulge in concerning the conditions of the people in our neighborhood, or the coldness of folk with regard to religion, or the difficulty in the work of the church and the discouragements? Do you ever listen carefully to discover whether there is no ripple of murmur in that? He has placed us in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation to shine as lights in the world. Now if there were no darkness there would be no need of a light, and He has notified us that He has put us in a perverse and crooked nation. He says, "Do all things without murmuring." Has it occurred to you when you and I are rehearsing the awful times in which we are living, especially with an accent of discouragement or with suggestion of the difficulty of doing anything good for God—I say, has it occurred to you that we are murmuring at the place in which we are set? Now God has not set us there to have things to our liking. He has set us there because they are not to our liking, and not to His liking, and He thought He could trust us to be there, a light in a dark place without our becoming dim or flickering or going out, just because it is so dark. "Do all things without murmurings and disputings that we may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God." He has set His sons around here and there as lights in dark places. He thought that seeing we were going to have light forever and ever in that city where he is the Light of the place, He thought we would be content to be set in a dark place for a little while to lighten up.

God has various means for placing His lights. They are distributed sometimes by persecutions, and so, friends, after you get the blessing of justification and press on to the blessing of sanctification, don't you shun the blessing of scatteration. We like to be in our own set, our own meeting, our own circle and crowd, and God likes us to like those that are unspiritual and so he sometimes permits us to be scattered by persecution and distributed because He is rather short on lights, and He has a great dark place to light up all over and He has to distribute them. Sometimes

He lets the distributing hand of persecution scatter His lights so that they will go around a little better.

Please, then, note that God has everything going on in the world with a view of benefitting us, developing us in the image and likeness of Christ. He has us going around in the world with the view of benefitting others, and, beloved, your placing and your displacing by the permissive providence of God has not been wholly on your account or for your sake. It has been because God has some other people to think of besides you. He is setting His lights upon this hill and that hill and another so that the valley may be lighted. That is one way He distributes and places His lights, by persecution, and it was in the Acts of the Apostles under the persecution that they were scattered abroad, and they went everywhere preaching the gospel. Bud Robinson says, "I have now taken my text and read it to you. I will now go everywhere preaching the gospel." You see the hand of God is back of this scattering of the faithful with the view to elimination of the darkness.

Another means is by His provident hand, as we are distributed in various ways in pursuit of health to various climates, or in pursuit of subsistence to various countries and industries and in various social relations that cause us to move and locate and settle, and then we find ourselves directly where we only meant to go for a little while. Somehow we are held and fixed through certain providences and events and necessities of the family that have fastened us there and we find that instead of just being passed along, we are set there. Do you think that was all by accident? If you were wholly sanctified, wholly consecrated, beloved, He was setting his candlesticks and "ye are the light of the world." And so the hand of Providence may often be seen in the selection of our places of abode or business or associations that fix our location. The hand of Providence has been back of much of this scatteration, and He has set us and fixed us sometimes for no other purpose than that of lighting the world where we are. I am not only to recognize my lot and position in life as a thing that is to work together for my good, but as a providence of God for the fulfilling of my mission in lighting the world.

The third way is that of the itinerant ministry. God has always instituted an itinerant ministry. There are elders and deacons recognized in the Scripture, they were permanent fixtures in the community, but then there were the travelling Titus and Timothy the travelling apostolic company, the missionary tours of Barnabas and Paul, and now there is an eternal go in the ministry. While I have faithfully dwelt upon the providences of God, I must be faithful in warning any of us that are called and commissioned to the ministry against entangling ourselves so as to defeat the itinerary of the ministry. How my conscience has been tendered at this point with all the interests of a growing and developing family, all the educational and temporary interests. I want to bear testimony not to myself but to His grace to this day from the time God called me to preach, between eighteen and nineteen years of age, I have never let a social matter, a martial matter, a family matter,

a business matter or a financial matter of any kind clinch me and bind me or hold me so I would not be free in obeying the heavenly vision. This is God's method, His chosen method with regard to a minister in sending forth His light and His truth, and for any of us that are thus called and commissioned for a foreign mission or for an itinerant ministry, to so fasten ourselves down and fix ourselves for any of these other considerations that I speak of, is to hinder and defeat that itineracy. It is for us to put our hand on one of the orbs of light with which God has planned to light a whole circle. There are three of the methods that God employs for the distribution and the placing of His lights, by the permitted hand of persecution, by the providential hand of distribution and by the ministerial call to itineracy and going forth to preach the word. So much for the locating and the setting of the lamps.

I would like next that we look at the oil in the lamps or vessels for this light. That is in the 13th verse, immediately preceding what I have just read. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure," the dwelling of God, the Holy Spirit in our own hearts. Beloved, if we are placed as a light, whether by itineracy or by providence or by persecution, if we are placed as a light and have not that indwelling of God working both to will and to do of His good pleasure, we will be as a candlestick, or a lamp without any light, only the show or pretense of a light and light maker. "God worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." He worketh in you to purpose, to desire, to intend; a desire to evangelize, a desire to shine for God, a desire to speak the truth; that is just one hemisphere of our nature under the divine operation, and alas, alas, the faith of many drops when they reach the boundary of that hemisphere. They don't grip on God and let God grip on them with a faith that He who has purposed the thing will also do it. You can fulfill your ministry. You can finish your job. You can do what God has made and redeemed you to do. You can make a success of your place, that is by letting God who wrought the noble desire, the noble purpose within your heart be honored with a present faith to do the thing. I want to urge you to not be waiting for greater help from the outside but to depend on the divine help on the inside. Put your dependence not on evangelistic methods, not on ministerial training, but he is saying, "I am going away," this great minister that has been there and he says, "As ye have obeyed in my presence only, now much more in my absence work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God which worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure." We have leaned too much to dependence upon externals.

We want to know that God has lighted us and put Himself in there to keep the supply of oil so that we may be steady burners. As the light in the holy place never went out, that the light in us and through us might never go out.

I remember how my mother would sometimes entertain us telling stories about her childhood. She came from Ireland. She was about eight years old when

(Continued on Page Seven)