

Title:           **ALONE IN THE DARK**

Text:            John 6:21

Subject:        *Proving Times for God's Elect*

Date:            Sunday Morning — March 29, 2009

Tape:          John #45

Reading:       *Psalm 88:1-18*

Introduction:

“How tedious and tasteless the hours,  
When JESUS no longer I see;  
Sweet prospects, sweet birds, and sweet flow'rs,  
Have lost all their sweetness with me!  
The mid-summer sun shines but dim,  
The fields strive in vain to look gay;  
But when I am happy in Him,  
December's as pleasant as May.

His name yields the richest perfume,  
And sweeter than music His voice;  
His presence disperses my gloom,  
And makes all within me rejoice!  
I should, were He always thus nigh,  
Have nothing to wish or to fear;  
No mortal so happy as I,  
My summer would last all the year.

Content with beholding His face,  
My all to his pleasure resigned;  
No changes of season or place,  
Would make any change in my mind.  
While blessed with a sense of His love,  
A palace a toy would appear;  
And prisons would palaces prove,  
If JESUS would dwell with me there.

Dear LORD, if indeed I am thine,  
If thou art my sun and my song;  
Say, why do I languish and pine,  
And why are my winters so long?  
O drive these dark clouds from my sky,

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Thy soul-cheering presence restore;  
Or take me unto Thee on high,  
Where winter and clouds are no more.”

— John Newton

When I was a boy, boys were taught never to show fear. If a boy let another boy know he was afraid, he would never hear the end of it. But not showing fear and not having fear are two different things. I don't think I ever showed it, but of all the things that caused me fear when I was a boy, other than the thought of my mother with a belt, nothing compared with being alone in the dark.

- The Dark Room at Ma's
- The Dark Pine Branch Road

The title of my message is **ALONE IN THE DARK**. Our text will be John 6:5-21. In these verses the Apostle John was inspired by God the Holy Spirit to record two of our Lord's great miracles. At first reading, they might appear to be unrelated; but that is not the case. In fact, if you read the Word of God carefully, you will see that this Book was written with a very specific order. The things that happened were brought to pass with very precise order; and our Lord's miracles were both performed and recorded in that precise order to teach us specific aspects of his greatness and his grace.

- In verses 5-14, the Lord Jesus took five loaves and two small fish from the hands of a boy and fed 5000 men.
- In verses 15-21, we see the Lord Jesus walking across the troubled, storm tossed sea to his disciples.

Let's read John's record of these two miracles. Then, I want us to put the two things together, as John did, and learn the lessons God the Holy Spirit has for us in these two great miracles.

(John 6:5-21) “When Jesus then lifted up *his* eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? (6) And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do. (7) Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. (8) One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, (9) There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many? (10) And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number

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about five thousand. (11) And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would. (12) When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. (13) Therefore they gathered *them* together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten. (14) Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world. (15) When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone. (16) And when even was *now* come, his disciples went down unto the sea, (17) And entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them. (18) And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew. (19) So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid. (20) But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid. (21) Then they willingly received him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.”

We often have our proving times. Don't we? Our proving times are seasons appointed by the Lord himself in which he proves himself to us and proves us to ourselves. These are times of trial and adversity, times that call for and demand faith, and more. — These proving times are times in which the Lord God graciously works faith in us, forcing us into his omnipotent arms of mercy, compelling us to do what we will never otherwise do, compelling us to cast all our care on him who cares for us.

- What a proving time it was for Abraham at Moriah!
- What a proving time all those years were for Jacob, when he thought Joseph was dead!
- What a proving time Job endured when the Lord turned Satan upon him!
- What a proving time Peter had when the Lord Jesus permitted Satan to sift him as wheat!
- In the first miracle, the Lord Jesus used a huge crowd of hungry people to prove Philip and the other disciples.
- In the second miracle the Son of God sent his disciples sailing directly into a storm, that he might prove them.

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- Like these disciples, you and I must have our proving times.

What are we to learn from these two miracles, from these two proving times? What lessons do these two miracles hold for you and me? Why are they here recorded as they are, by the finger of God, for our learning and our admonition?

**FIVE OBVIOUS LESSONS**

1. *First*, learn this and remember it. — **THE LORD GOD, OUR GREAT SAVIOR, ALWAYS KNOWS WHAT HE WILL DO** (vv. 5-6).

(John 6:5-6) “When Jesus then lifted up *his* eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? (6) And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.”

We are often caught off guard. Nothing ever catches him off guard. We are often taken by surprise. Nothing ever catches him by surprise. We are often unprepared. He is never unprepared. Our great God and Savior always knows what he will do.

- He knew what he would do before Lucifer fell, before Adam sinned, and before we went astray from the womb!
- Poor, lost sinner, he knows what he will do for you!
- Child of God, he knows what he will do for you.

“He knows: let this my comfort be;  
He knows the path designed for me;  
A healing balm for all my woes—  
O blessed thought! — My Savior knows!

The thorns that pierce my weary feet;  
The low’ring clouds, the storms that beat;  
And then, with bliss of calm repose,  
O blessed thought! — My Savior knows!

He knows: let this suffice for me;  
He knows the end I cannot see;  
Then let my anxious heart be still,  
And patient, wait my Savior’s will.

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My prayer for strength to Him is known,  
Tho' breathed in secret and alone;  
The weary heart, the tear that flows,  
O blessed thought! — My Savior knows!

The thing our Savior knew he would do in these two miracles is the very thing he is constantly doing; — actually, the two things he is always doing with us and for us.

- He was about to show his disciples their utter insufficiency. — “*Without me ye can do nothing*” (John 15:5).
- And he was about to show them his all-sufficiency (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

(2 Corinthians 12:7-10) “And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. (8) For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. (9) And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (10) Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

- Gideon’s army was a mighty one indeed, when it was reduced to an army of 300 men too scared to get a drink of water!

And I assure you of this: — Before ever the Lord Jesus causes the light of his grace to shine upon you, he will fill you with the darkness of his terror.

2. **Second, WHEN THE LORD JESUS TRIES AND PROVES US, THOUGH HE SIFT US AS WHEAT AND REFINE US AS SILVER, NOTHING SHALL BE LOST BY THE TRIAL, AND MUCH GAINED.**

These very disciples whom the Master proved were required to “*Gather up the fragments that remained, that nothing be lost*” (v. 12); and they gathered up twelve baskets of fragments!

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- “Lacked ye anything?” (Luke 22:35)
- Israel Spoiling Egypt
- The Three Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace
- Job
- Peter

(Isaiah 43:1-5) “But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called *thee* by thy name; thou *art* mine. (2) When thou passest through the waters, I *will be* with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. (3) For I *am* the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt *for* thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. (4) Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. (5) Fear not: for I *am* with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west.”

After our Lord Jesus performed this great miracle, those who saw what he had done said, “Surely this is the Messiah, that Prophet” (v. 14; John 1:21; Deuteronomy 18:15). Like all of Israel, they were looking for a leader, a king, a Messiah to lead them in a successful revolt against the hated Romans (Acts 5:36-37).

- They did not understand that the Messiah’s kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, a kingdom not of this world (John 18:36), but within us.
- They did not know the meaning of the sacrifices and the atonement portraying the Messiah’s redemptive work.

**Do not be misled by those who talk of Christ the Prophet and King but who despise his cross!** Our Lord immediately withdrew from these ambitious men who wanted to make him king over a nation of unbelievers. He came to save sinners, to redeem a people for his glory, to call out of every nation a holy people to reign forever with him in a new heaven and a new earth (Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9-10). These Jews had professed with their lips Christ as that Prophet and would by force make him King, but there is another office, which comes in between these. Christ must officiate as Priest, offering himself as a sacrifice for sin. Besides, he needed not to be made king by them; he is the King (Revelation 19:16).

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3. Here's the *third* lesson. — **WHILE LIVING IN THIS WORLD WE WILL HAVE, AND MUST HAVE, OUR NIGHTS ALONE** (vv. 16-17).

Oh, blessed is the sinner whom the Son of God sweetly forces to be shut up, alone in the darkness of his guilt and sin! — John 8:1-8!

(John 6:16-17) “And when even was *now* come, his disciples went down unto the sea, (17) And entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them.”

Matthew tells (Matthew 14:22-23) us that the disciples boarded this ship and set sail for the other side because the Lord Jesus told them to do so. They looked for the Master on every boat that passed; but he did not come to them. Then it got dark; and he still had not come to them. There they were in the middle of the sea, because they were obeying him, but he had not come to them. They were alone in the dark. Then, a terrible storm arose (v. 18). They manned the oars and rowed hard against the storm; but these experienced seamen knew they were getting nowhere. The darkness was thick. The storm was great. The winds were strong. — And they were alone in the dark.

- They were the Lord's servants; but the Lord was not with them.
- They were doing what the Lord told them to do; but he had not come to them.
- They had twelve baskets of food in the boat with them, but they couldn't eat a bite!

Every lost sinner's life is one long, starless night! But the believer has his night too.

- We have our nights of trial, adversity and pain.
- We have our nights of emptiness, desolation and woe.
- We have our nights of sorrow, bereavement and heartache.

The Church of God has her night. She is “*not of the night,*” but she has “nights.” Darkness, tempest and dangers are all around us. — “*Famine, and nakedness, and peril, and sword*” continually assail us. How dark the night is when the Lord Jesus is not with us! When he appears to have abandoned us!

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(Job 30:26) “When I looked for good, then evil came *unto me*: and when I waited for light, there came darkness.”

(Micah 7:8) “Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD *shall be* a light unto me.”

**The Lord has given me something that will help you make it through the night.** — Darkness engulfed them. — Danger roared around them. — Desertion withered them! — But...

- Things are not as they appear. — The Savior is with you!
- The night has not come because of some evil you have done; but to make you know, again and again, by experience your utter insufficiency and Christ’s all-sufficiency.
- These night seasons, alone in the dark, make us conscious of our need.
- The Savior’s mercy, love and grace are unchanged!

“If ever it should come to pass  
That one sheep of Christ should fall away;  
My fickle, feeble soul, alas!  
Would fall a thousand times a day.”

**But night seasons are not wasted seasons.** In fact, if you care to look with me in the Word of God, you will find that for God’s saints these night seasons are very profitable seasons for our souls. — **In the darkness of night the Lord God has given stars for light** (Jeremiah 31:35; Revelation 1:20).

(Jeremiah 31:35) “Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, *and* the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts *is* his name.”

(Revelation 1:20) “The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.”

- **In the night season, when we find ourselves in the dark alone, we are compelled to seek the Savior** (Song of Solomon 3:1-5).



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(Song of Songs 3:1-5) “By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. (2) I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. (3) The watchmen that go about the city found me: *to whom I said*, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth? (4) *It was* but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother’s house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me. (5) I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake *my* love, till he please.”

- **The night of darkness is the time when the sweetest revelations of the Savior come** (Daniel 7:2, 9; Zechariah 1:8).

(Daniel 7:2) “Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea.”

(Daniel 7:9) “I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment *was* white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne *was like* the fiery flame, *and* his wheels *as* burning fire.”

(Zechariah 1:8) “I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that *were* in the bottom; and behind him *were there* red horses, speckled, and white.”

Nicodemus came to the Savior by night; and, I suspect, you will too.

- **In the darkest of the night, the Lord God our Savior, will appear for our glorious defense** (Isaiah 4:5-6).

(Isaiah 4:5-6) “And the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory *shall be* a defence. (6) And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain.”

**ALONE IN THE DARK**4. **Fourth, THE LORD JESUS WILL COME TO YOU IN THE NIGHT OF YOUR STORM, AND COME TO YOU IN SUCH A WAY AS HE COULD NOT OTHERWISE APPEAR** (v. 17-20).

(John 6:17-20) “And entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them. (18) And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew. (19) So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid. (20) But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid.”

The Lord’s disciples were in the midst of a terrible storm, in the middle of a dark, dark night. They were toiling hard with trouble, but everything appeared to be contrary to them. In those circumstances, our all-glorious, ever-gracious Savior came to his troubled friends, walking upon the sea that caused them so much trouble, they were afraid (terrified). They thought they saw a ghost! As he approached their little, storm tossed boat, he said, “*Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.*” Then, “*he went up unto them into the ship, and the wind ceased*” (Mark 6:45-51).

This is written in the Book of God for you and me, “*that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope*” (Romans 15:4). The Lord Jesus will graciously step into your storm-tossed life and cause the winds that appear to be so contrary to you today to be calm.

**Remember, it was the Lord Jesus who sent his friends into the storm, who sent them away from himself** (Mark 6:45-46). He seems to have done so specifically that he might come to them when they desperately needed him, speak these words to them and make himself known to them in a way that was not otherwise possible. Surely, that is the case with you. Listen, then, to the voice of your tender, omnipotent Savior in the midst of your storm. — “*Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.*”

- “*It is I*” who raised the tempest in your soul, and will control it.
- “*It is I*” who sent your affliction, and will be with you in it.
- “*It is I*” who kindled the furnace, and will watch the flames, and bring you through it.
- “*It is I*” who formed your burden, who carved your cross, and who will strengthen you to bear it.

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- “*It is I*” who mixed your cup of grief, and will enable you to drink it with meek submission to your Father’s will.
- “*It is I*” who took from you your strength and health, your peace and tranquility.
- “*It is I*” who made the light darkness about you and raised the contrary winds.
- “*It is I*” who have done all these things, not against you but for you, not to hurt you but to do you good.

I make the clouds my chariot, and clothe myself with the tempest as with a garment. The night hour is my time of coming to you. The dark, surging waves and billows are the pavement upon which I walk. Take courage!

- “*It is I*”. Don’t be afraid.
- “*It is I*,” your Friend, your Brother, your God, your Savior! I am causing all the circumstances of your life to work together for your good.

“*It is I*” who brought this storm that assails you. Your affliction did not spring out of the ground, but came down from above — a heaven sent blessing disguised as an angel of light clad in a robe of darkness. William Cowper’s hymn describes God’s ways so well. We need often to be reminded that, as Cowper put it...

“God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform.  
He plants His footsteps in the sea,  
And rides upon the storm.”

Deep, in unfathomable mines  
Of never failing skill,  
He treasures up His bright designs,  
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,  
The clouds you so much dread  
Are big with mercy and will break  
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace.  
Behind the frowning providence

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He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour.  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower!”

He who loves you with an everlasting love has sent this storm in love for your soul, not in anger. Be assured, my brother, be assured, my sister, — This trial will not be forever. It will not always cast you down. — “*It is I*” who ordered, arranged and control it. In every stormy wind, in every dark night, in every lonely hour, in every rising fear, may God the Holy Spirit give us grace to hear our Savior’s voice, saying to us, “*Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.*”

**Hear me, now, poor sinner, despairing of life, shut up and alone.** — If the Lord has stripped you, he will clothe you. If he has emptied you, he will fill you. If he wounds, he will heal! If he kills, he will make alive. If you know your need of him, come to him for mercy, for he has come to you with mercy! If now you seek his mercy, your cry for mercy is but the answer to mercy already bestowed!

“I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew  
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me;  
It was not I that found, O Saviour true,  
No, I was found of Thee.

Thou didst reach forth Thy hand and mine enfold;  
I walked and sank not on the storm-vexed sea,—  
‘Twas not so much that I on Thee took hold,  
As Thou, dear Lord, on me.

I find, I walk, I love, but, O the whole  
Of love is but my answer, Lord, to Thee;  
For Thou wert long beforehand with my soul,  
Always Thou lovedst me.”

5. *Fifth*, **AS SOON AS THE SAVIOR COMES, THE TROUBLED SOUL RECEIVES HIM WILLINGLY INTO THE SHIP; AND**

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(v. 21).

(John 6:21) “Then they willingly received him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.”

This language seems to indicate that a miracle of grace was immediately wrought. They were instantaneously saved from their danger. The desire of their hearts was fully met, and immediately! Instantly, they arrived at the longed-for haven of rest. — As soon as Christ is willingly received into your ship, that reception of the Savior is always accompanied with deliverance and rest (Matthew 11:28-30). Instant salvation is the gift of him who saves to the uttermost.

(Matthew 11:28-30) “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (29) Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. (30) For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light.”

When the disciples got to about the middle of the lake they seemed to be dead beat, but what they could not do the Lord Jesus immediately did when he got into their ship. — Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.

(Psalms 107:23-31) “They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; (24) These see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep. (25) For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. (26) They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. (27) They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit’s end. (28) Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. (29) He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. (30) Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven. (31) Oh that *men* would praise the LORD *for* his goodness, and *for* his wonderful works to the children of men!”

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Blessed is that night of darkness that introduces us more fully into the fellowship of and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ! And blessed be his name forever, there is a day coming, the long, eternal day of glory is at hand! — “*So shall we ever be with the Lord!*” If his presence made night not only endurable but even pleasant for these disciples, what joy his presence will make for us in that coming day!

“There is coming a day when no heartaches shall come  
No more clouds in the sky, no more tears to dim the eye.  
All is peace forevermore on that happy golden shore,  
What a day, glorious day that will be.

There'll be no sorrow there, no more burdens to bear,  
No more sickness, no pain, no more parting over there;  
And forever I will be with the One who died for me,  
What a day, glorious day that will be.

What a day that will be when my Jesus I shall see,  
And I look upon His face,  
The One who saved me by His grace;  
When He takes me by the hand  
And leads me through the Promised Land,  
What a day, glorious day that will be.  
What a day, glorious day that will be!”

Amen!