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God's kindness amidst trouble

"Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun," Ecclesiastes 11:7.

I am sure I speak for many Christians when I say that the above verse, part of my daily reading this morning, is especially relevant and applicable today.

As one of those under the strictest 'lockdown', involving 4 months of 'self-isolation' (which is likely to be extended since the confusion amongst the ranks of those leading the nation at this time of crisis is troubling, to say the least, and does not augur well for the future), the wonderful spell of sunshine has been a special blessing.

In the midst of trouble, we happily rest upon the unfailing provision of our God and Saviour. We are exhorted not to worry or fret. "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus," Philippians 4:6-7.

The word 'careful' means quite literally 'to be full of care, to be anxious'. We are not to be full of care but rather, we are to be full of faith: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you," 1 Peter 5:6-7.

While we are thankful for those national agencies, most of which have their origins in the grace and love of true Christians, many generations ago, we see above all in the caring facilities in our land, the merciful providence of God.

Yesterday, I received an email bearing sad news regarding a dear friend of long standing. There was quoted within the email, the great old hymn by William Gadsby (Free Presbyterian hymnal, 'Psalms, Paraphrases and Hymns', number 558).

Here are the words and they suit us well today, especially the final verse.

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| 1. Sovereign Ruler of the skies!
Ever gracious, ever wise!
All my times are in Thy hand,
All events at Thy command. | 4. Times of sickness, times of health,
Times of penury and wealth;
Times of trial and of grief,
Times of triumph and relief. |
| 2. His decree, who formed the earth,
Fixed my first and second birth;
Parents, native place and time,
All appointed were by Him. | 5. Times the tempter's power to prove,
Times to taste a Saviour's love:
All must come, and last and end,
As shall please my heavenly Friend. |
| 3. He that formed me in the womb,
He shall guide me to the tomb;
All my times shall ever be
Ordered by His wise decree. | 6. Plagues and deaths around me fly,
Till He bids I cannot die:
Not a single shaft can hit
Till the God of love thinks fit. |

The sunshine of recent weeks has been a blessing for those in 'self-isolation', though I feel that all too many never consider for a moment the source of that sunshine as they bask beneath its warming rays.



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As one who can recall many 'Aprils', I cannot recall such a wonderful time of pleasant weather. Possible I was too active to pay much heed to what the weather was like. But in the past few weeks I have had time to consider many things which perhaps I did not in former years.

The sunshine has been to me and my wife Ann, as we 'self-isolate' here in Kilskeery, a wonderful blessing. We have sat out day after day and enjoyed it. I for one, who never really could sit on a deck chair, even during family holidays, have blissfully sat for hours on our front porch, which faces south, and rejoiced in the mercy and goodness of God.

It has been part of that mercy to have loving and attentive members of our family, who live close to us, provide for our needs, delivering groceries etc and chatting to us at a safe distance!

But over it all has been the smile of God, manifested in the sunshine from above.

Paul the apostle likens the shining of the sun to that blessed entrance of gospel light to the soul of the one God redeems in His mercy. "At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest," Acts 26:13-15.

That was not just Paul's experience but for all those saved by God's grace, we can recall that glorious 'sunrise' when Gospel light entered our soul.

The sweet benefits of the sunshine of which we have been made conscious in recent days, all picture for us what the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ has brought to us.

Gospel sunshine brings health to our souls even as the sun's rays benefit our bodies. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God," Psalm 43:5. As the sun causes our face to glow with health, even so gospel grace brings a happy, contented expression to our countenance.

The Church of Christ, when it is in a state of blessing and revival is described in the Song of Solomon as "she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?" 6:10. The word 'clear' speaks of 'purity'. How indescribably pure is the sunshine! Even so, the gospel turns poor sinful men into those who bear the marks of heaven in their lives. As John says: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure," 1 John 3:1-3.

Of course, there are those who foolishly worship the sun. It was most common amongst the heathen nations of long ago but there is a form of such 'worship' practised still today!

We have all seen the reports of those who defied the 'self-isolating' regulations in order to lie out and sun-bathe. I have no hesitation in saying that those who act so have not the slightest regard for the One Who created the sunshine. Had they any consideration of Him they would remember the words of Paul to Titus. "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work," 3:1. There is a growing spirit of defiance against today's restrictions. Many of course are greatly affected by the shutting down of their places of employment and the resultant loss of income. With such we must have sympathy. But others bitterly complain when all they are grieved about is the loss of those 'self-indulgent' facilities which are presently denied them in the effort to stop the spread of Covid 19.



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I think nothing illustrates this more than the decision by Alliance Party Stormont Assembly minister, Naomi Long, to press for the opening of 'off licences' during the 'lock-down' as an essential business.

Churches were to be shut, and that for good reasons since gathering congregations could only result in the spread of the virus, but when the sale of alcohol is considered as an essential service to be maintained, then we see get an insight into the thinking of the nation and its 'leaders'!

The shining of the sun in the heavens should provide the Christian with another sweet consideration. It pictures our Saviour!

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.

The sun is the chief feature of the revelation contained in the parchment of creation unveiled around us and above us! Even so is Christ in the parchment of Holy Scripture!

"To him (Christ) give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins," Acts 10:43.

Christ is the source of light and truth, set forth in the Bible.

"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name," John 20:30-31.

Furthermore, it is clearly seen that the Sun rules in the heavens. It is the sun which begins and ends our day.

Likewise, there is a vital spiritual lesson there for us all.

"To him that made great lights: for his mercy endureth for ever: the sun to rule by day: for his mercy endureth for ever," Psalm 136:7-8.

Even so Christ ruleth over all. How much is this truth forgotten, even to a large degree by Christians! The disciples panicked in the midst of the storm on the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 8:25) and even so do disciples amidst the storms of life still! But dear Christian, the Lord Jesus, like the sun, rules in the heavens! "The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all," Psalm 103:19.

"Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure," Psalm 2:1-5. There is no 'panic' in heaven over the rebellious defiance of men on earth. Let us learn from the Lord and rest confidently in His sovereign power.

One final point.

When the sunshine of the heavens ceases, then let men fear for the end of the day of mercy has come. When the sunshine fades at the end of the day, nighttime, with all its foreboding connotations, begins!

Even so shall it be at the end of this age!



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"Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible," Isaiah 13:9-11.

"The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining: and the LORD shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great: for he is strong that executeth his word: for the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?" Joel 2:10-11.

There can be no doubt as to what these events will signal. Christ makes it very plain for us.

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory," Matthew 24:29-30.

"And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" Revelation 6:12-17.

Yes, God in His mercy warns the world once every 24 hours with the setting of the sun, of the 'great day of his wrath' that is coming!

Dear Reader, I trust you are ready and that as you consider this daily warning, you can rejoice that it is well with your soul!

The Lord bless these few words to your good and comfort.

Rev Ivan Foster. (Rtd)

24th April 2020.