

Sermon Title: God Over the Darkness, November 20, 2010 (Scripture is from NIV)

Scripture Reading: 1Kings 8:10-13

Introduction

Good evening. My name is John-Michael. I direct Jerusalem Ministry, which is an orphanage ministry here in Seoul. And I've been living and serving at a children's home here in Korea for almost five years now. I'm honored to be able to bring the word of the Lord for tonight's prayer meeting.

I want to ask you all to open your Bibles to Romans 8:28. This is a well known verse that perhaps a number of you have memorized. This verse is going to be the foundation of this message. I feel God wants to reveal Himself to you all in a new way tonight, but without the knowledge of the truth in Romans 8:28 I feel it is impossible to receive the revelation God desires to release.

Romans 8:28 – And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose.

I want to emphasize that all things literally means, "All things." The truth in Romans 8:28 is that God is able to make every single thing in your life work for your good. God is able to take every single memory, every single struggle, even every sin, and work it for your good. This is a verse we like to cling to during our small struggles, and we can often see God work our small struggles into blessings and greater revelations of Him.

But what about the greater struggles, not just for us but also in this world? Addiction. Imprisonment. Physical and sexual abuse. Sex trafficking. Child slavery. Murder. Where is Romans 8:28 in these areas? Where is God in these struggles? Is He angry? Is He withdrawn? How is He feeling? What is He doing? Does Romans 8:28 not apply?

For those of you who are taking notes, tonight's message is titled: "**God Over the Darkness.**" Before I get into it, let me say a prayer for us.

Pray (declare hearts opening, declare safety in the place, ask for more revelation)

Please open your Bibles to 1Kings 8:10-12. (Ask who has their Bibles here tonight)

1Kings 8:10-12 – When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled his temple. Then Solomon said, "The Lord has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud."

I would like you to underline or highlight the words "dark cloud" in verse 12. The King James version reads, "The Lord said that he would dwell in the thick darkness." In the original text, the Hebrew word for dark cloud and thick darkness in this verse is the word, "Araphel." **Please repeat after me, "Araphel."** I'm going to share a few other verses that use this particular word for darkness. Verse twelve clearly states that God dwells in a dark cloud, in thick darkness. God dwells in the araphel.

In these verses we can also clearly see that the people of God, including the priests, were overwhelmed by this cloud and could not do the services that they would usually do. This

was a side of God they had never experienced before, and it overwhelmed them. But while the people were overwhelmed, King Solomon was undaunted and instead pressed in more to God. What follows is the longest prayer recorded in Scripture, lifted up by King Solomon in response to God's presence. He saw God in such a new way that he was able to pray like never before. He was able to connect with God like never before.

This wasn't the first time God had shown up in a dark cloud though. Please turn in your Bibles to Exodus 20. In this chapter God is speaking to the people of Israel from Mount Sinai. They are all gathered at the bottom of the mountain. Let's start at verse eighteen, right after God has shared with them the Ten Commandments. Compare the peoples' response to God here with how the priests' responded in the previous passage.

Exodus 20:18-21 – When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.” Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.” The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the **thick darkness** where God was.

Thick darkness. You can go ahead and highlight those two words. Once again, the Hebrew translation is the word “Araphel.” Thick darkness. God was dwelling in a darkness so thick and imposing that the people of Israel were frightened and wanted to leave. They told Moses to go in but that they would remain in the camp. They believed if they got any closer to God that they would die. Basically, they felt they had gotten close enough. Only Moses was bold enough to enter the darkness. And later we read that only Moses spoke with God face to face and reflected God's glory to the people. Only Moses had this intimacy with God.

Reflect on that for a moment. **Only Moses was bold enough to enter the thick darkness.** And it would only be Moses who would speak with God face to face and be close friends with God.

Kids Are Usually Scared of the Dark

The people of Israel were new in their faith. Unlike Moses, they hadn't personally encountered God in a powerful way before. The truth is, they were as we like to put it, “Baby Christians” or young believers in God. And it is natural for children to be scared of the dark, especially if society teaches them that only evil lurks in the darkness.

When I was a child I always liked the hall light on when I would go to bed so that I could see some light coming in underneath the door. For whatever reason, that little bit of light gave me comfort. And if I watched a scary movie then I would want my door open a little because the darkness would seem even darker to me those nights. We are taught from a young age that darkness is bad and light is good.

Part of growing up is getting over such fears and becoming more secure. Most adults do not need the hall light on at night in order for them to fall asleep. It would be pretty sad if a father were just as scared of the dark as his son. **Instead it is the father's duty to reassure his son and teach his son that he has nothing to fear.** A good father doesn't let his child live in fear, but rather teaches and demonstrates to the child how safe they are.

During my first three years here in Korea I lived in the children's home that I serve at. I slept in the guest apartment which also served as the quarantine room when kids were sick. I had

plenty of boys with pink eye or chicken pox stay with me while I lived in the home. They slept in the small room right across from mine in the apartment. This was always a new experience for the younger boys because they were used to sleeping with six or seven other boys in their dorm room. My place was different, and for some of them it was their first time sleeping alone. And I remember the young boys when they would first arrive they would ask me if I get scared at night living alone. They would innocently ask me, “괴물 오면 어떻게...?” “If a monster comes, what do you do? And I would bend down towards them and respond, “괴물 오면...” “If a monster comes...” And I would pretend to grab the monster, punch and kick it, throw it out, and then wipe my hands together and say, “괴물은 안 무서워. 아무것도 못해. 나 하나님 있잖아. 하나님 더 힘세.” “Monsters aren’t scary. They can’t do anything. I have God. God is stronger.” My boys would always immediately smile and get excited. I would tell them that they have God too and they don’t need to fear anything. And these boys would sleep soundly at night.

One of the marks of maturity is no longer being scared of the dark. But there isn’t a specific age when this fear disappears, rather it is when the revelation comes that you are safe and there is nothing to be afraid of. Security and trust must be established.

During my last year at Virginia Tech I led a house church of about 25 first years. This group was unique in that many of them were new Christians and most of them had traumatic pasts... whether they were abused, abandoned, or both. But there was a lot of grace over the group and they were all excited about God and very innocent in their faith. We had a great time together and they were steadily growing with God. I knew though that the deeper issues needed to be dealt with. That the wounds and scars needed to be healed. I knew that many of them needed to forgive their fathers or other people in their life that had hurt them. And it would pain me because at the time I lacked the anointing and the experience to be able to lead them into full healing and deliverance. I would get frustrated with God that He had put such precious people in my life but that I couldn’t fully heal them. But God would always reassure me during that year. He would tell me, “They aren’t ready yet. They need more of my love and comfort. They need you to be a father and an older brother to them.” Trust takes time.

I can’t simply tell a child, “Being alone in the dark isn’t scary. You’ll be fine.” and then leave the child alone in the darkness to face their fear all night. That is cruel. In the same way, I can’t tell a new Christian, “God loves you. God has forgiven you. God tells you to forgive and bless. Now go forgive and bless the man who abused you throughout your childhood.” That is evil. I can’t expect the new Christian to be able to face the darkest places of their past right away. **There needs to be a development of trust, of love, and the knowledge that they are safe before they can enter the darkness.**

God has been faithful. Since graduating from Virginia Tech I have continued to grow with the Lord and now lead the healing and deliverance ministry at New Philadelphia Church. I have had the privilege to visit America and lead some of the members of that group into their full healing and deliverance. God is good! He is the author and perfecter of our faith. He wants the best for us and doesn’t waste anything.

Turn with me to Isaiah 60.

Isaiah 60:1-3 – “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.”

There are two words for darkness in this passage. The first darkness is the Hebrew word “Chosek.” That word is used for darkness throughout the Bible. But the second darkness in verse two, the thick darkness, which most people would naturally feel is the scarier darkness, is once again the Hebrew word “Araphel.” It is the same thick darkness that Moses entered on Mount Sinai. The same thick darkness that consumed the temple of God and enabled King Solomon to pray like never before. This is the thick darkness that Isaiah 60 refers to. That while literal darkness is over the earth, God’s thick darkness is over the people. He is there, but we have train our eyes to see Him.

Even non-Christians will say things like, “The world seems to be getting darker.” We look at the sex trade, the debauchery, the greed and injustice around us, and we call these things darkness. Even God labels such deeds as deeds done in the dark. There are memories that many of us have that we prefer to keep in the dark. There may have been bouts with depression that we may have labeled as, “darker times” in our past. Perhaps even now you feel jaded and unable to see God’s light and joy, feeling as if you are always wearing sunglasses and walking in a dark cloud.

I want to tell you that God does not approve of the sex trade, the debauchery, or the greed and injustice. God does not orchestrate evil. God is good and God is love. God does not orchestrate depression or abuse or murder. God does not give a spirit of fear, but rather His perfect love drives out fear. God wants the best for His children. One of the names of God is El Roi: The God Who Sees. Another name of God is Immanuel: God With Us. I want to tell you that in every struggle, amidst all evil, God is there. **God is the God over the darkness.** Even in the places of injustice and evil, even in the memories of trauma and hurt, and even amidst the struggles with depression and futility... God is there. And He is calling us to not focus on the evil or the pain or the thoughts of this world, but rather to see and look to Him. He is there. **And the truth is, you will receive some of the greatest revelations of His love and His goodness as you find Him amidst the darkness.**

When I counsel someone who has traumatic memories in their past, one of the steps of leading them into full healing and deliverance is bringing them back to those traumatic memories. We call this inner healing. I explain to the counselee that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). Jesus promises us that He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). Jesus promises us that He is with us forever, even now until the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). So in every moment of our lives, He has been with us. There was never a moment where He turned His back or disappeared. I explain to them that is easy for us to see Jesus in our times of joy and love because His light is clear to us in those moments. But even when things seem dark around us, He is still with us. **The same God that makes us lie down in green pastures and beside still waters also leads us through the valley of the shadow of death and gives us a feast in front of our enemies.** That while the circumstances around us may change, like the green pastures, still waters, valleys of shadows, and seeing those who hate us, Jesus is always with us. And we are called to not base our comfort and our identity upon our circumstances, but rather upon His presence in our lives. We are called not to focus upon our earthly circumstances, but rather on God.

Inner healing is like surgery. You don't just do surgery on a person who needs it at anytime. First they need to be prepared for it. Their body has to be at a certain level of health to endure the surgery. For a Christian to receive the deep inner healing, they need a certain level of trust and love with God. And surgery isn't painless. Instead, the wound has to be opened up in order to be worked on. And the same for inner healing, the memory cannot be ignored but must be addressed. We have to open up the wound. And as we return to the memory and identify once again with the pain and the hurt from the memory, we then let the Healer do His work. I instruct the counselee to invite Jesus into the memory and to look for Him. I will let us sit silently with our eyes closed for a few moments as the counselee vividly remembers and speaks out what was happening and the emotions felt. And soon they are able to see Jesus. They see Him in the memory and they see His emotions and His love. They watch and listen as He speaks to them and comforts them. God's light begins to fill the darkness of the memory.

Inner healing, like treating any wound, isn't easy. It can be hard to train our eyes on God when for so long all we saw was darkness and hurt. But it is always good. I want to read for you a part of a testimony of a sister from that Virginia Tech house church that I was later able to counsel. As a child her mother had married and divorced different men. One of her stepfathers while growing up became an alcoholic. At night, when he was drunk and would think she was asleep, he would enter her room and molest her. I'm going to read this straight from her testimony that she wrote a few weeks after the session...

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The memory of being sexually molested by my stepdad was the most difficult. It was hard to see Jesus in the memory because I was still holding onto the fear and confusion I felt during that time. As I kept praying and inviting Jesus into the memory, I saw angels surrounding my bed. Jesus was lying down next to me with His face towards mine. I was laying on my side with my back towards my stepdad and during the molestation Jesus kept telling me to keep my eyes on Him, to look into His eyes. I felt Jesus telling me that this shouldn't happen but He's going to make things right in the end. Afterwards, my head was cradled in Jesus' arms and He held me until I cried myself back to sleep. I felt sorrow but comfort at the same time. Sorrow that this dark thing had to happen but comforted that Jesus was there when it happened; I wasn't alone. I didn't understand why this had to happen but I trusted Him. There was trust instead of fear with Jesus in the memory.

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What was interesting was right after we prayed through this memory and she experienced seeing Jesus and receiving His comfort, a bird outside the window of the room we were in began chirping. She was surprised, because it was a unique chirp, and it was the same unique chirp that she used to hear every morning when she would wake up while living with that stepfather. She remembered always feeling hope for some reason when she would hear that bird when she would wake up. And when she heard it during our session she felt God's love around her even stronger. God was with her.

God released in her the grace and love to forgive and bless her stepfather, who she had held unforgiveness against for most of her life. God also strengthened her identity that He is with her and that she is an over comer. **If God was with her in even that dark of a memory, she can be rest assured that He is with her always.** And during her session we didn't just cover memories of trauma done to her, but also her own personal sins and struggles. And even in those, as she confessed and repented to God and renounced the false identities she had received from the sins, she was able to then see and experience God's love and grace.

God was with her through the sin. And like the prodigal's father, he was not judging. His arms were still open.

Although the trauma done to her and her own personal sins were not God's doing, He was still with her. And as we addressed those memories and sins, He was able to begin to turn them for her good. She was able to experience God's grace, love, and presence like never before. **As she stepped into the darkest parts of her past looking to God, she was able see and know Him in completely new ways.** Our God is God over the darkness. We are able to find Him in even the most desperate places.

I asked at the beginning of the message, where is God among the darkest struggles? Addiction. Imprisonment. Physical and sexual abuse. Sex trafficking. Child slavery. Murder. God is in no way the cause of these things and is in no way supporting them. But that doesn't mean that He isn't there.

Samson struggled with addiction to lust, but God was still there. Joseph and so many others in the Bible were locked away in prison seemingly for good, but God was with them and would deliver them. The apostle Paul, before he was saved, was known to abuse and imprison families of God. Esther was a part of one of the biggest acts of sex trafficking in history. David committed adultery and set up the death of his friend. Daniel was orphaned and exiled as a slave into a foreign land. Moses himself murdered a man. Did God condone any of these things? Of course not. But God was still there in those dark moments. There were consequences for the sins, but God never left them. And the grace and redemption He would release in their lives enabled each of those men and women to know Him in far greater ways.

A common lie of the enemy is that because of my past, I can only grow so close to the Lord or be used by the Lord so much. That I will always have to carry the guilt and shame of my sins and mistakes. That I will always have to carry the pain and wounds of the darkest moments of my life. But those are all lies. Jesus came that you may have life and have it to the full (John 10:10). We are called to cast our cares upon the Lord because He cares for us (1Peter 5:7).

In the first chapter of Matthew is a genealogy of Jesus' ancestors. It is a long list of names. In historical genealogies usually only the fathers were listed, but in this genealogy God chooses to mention four women who were ancestors of Jesus. Their names are Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. Tamar was a widow who disguised herself as a prostitute in order to sleep with her father-in-law and have a son. Rahab was a prostitute who lived in a city consumed by sin: Jericho. Ruth was a foreign widow whose lineage had a shameful past. And Bathsheba was the married woman who King David slept with and eventually married after David had her husband killed in battle. These were the women that God chose to highlight in the genealogy. Through God's grace, despite their shame and their dark pasts, He redeemed their lives and used them to eventually bring about the Savior of the world, Jesus.

Our God is able to work all things for our good. Even in the darkest places God is present and is able to reveal treasures and light. Our God is God over the darkness. With Him we are safe and secure.

I believe God wants to release greater revelation in us of His presence in our darkest places. Amidst the darkness of North Korea, the darkness of the sex industry here in South Korea,

and the darkness of the media and greed, God is present and will soon reveal His grace, His redemption, and His calling for many. But I believe He wants to start with us first. That before we are able to proclaim God in the darkness around us, we first have to discover Him within us.

God wants to bring healing tonight. He wants to reveal His presence amidst our struggles. He desires to work all things in our lives for our good. He wants you to ask Him to reveal Himself in the darkest places in your past.

I want to ask Pastor Christian and Erin up on stage with me and we are going to go into a time of prayer. Before healing can happen love must be established. I want to pray a prayer releasing His love over you all. And then we will see how the Spirit leads tonight...

Pray (God is with you. God is good. God is love.)

***Hurt by a harsh word?

***Ask those who need inner healing/to forgive to stand

***Invite up those who need a touch of His love