

“Progress through Declension”
(John 3:30)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we saw the blessings the Lord poured out on Solomon’s kingdom:
 - a. He had fulfilled His promise to Abraham to make his descendants as numerous as the sand by the seashore.
 - b. He had established Solomon’s kingdom and blessed it with peace within and without.
 - c. The true worship of the true God was established and carried out.
 - d. They had the greatest and wisest of all kings who ever reigned – with one exception: namely, Christ – ruling over them.
 - e. And because they were walking in the ways of the Lord, they experienced tremendous prosperity.
2. All of these things were foreshadowing what would happen when Christ came.
 - a. We have seen most of them already fulfilled.
 - (i) Through His work, He has redeemed an innumerable host.
 - (ii) For His work, He has been granted a kingdom that will last forever and a host of people to rule over forever.
 - (iii) He has established the true worship of God and the true way to God – through Himself alone.
 - (iv) And He is the most glorious and wisest King who has ever ruled over all the earth.
 - b. There is one blessing, though, that hasn’t yet been fulfilled: that of peace and prosperity. But it will:
 - (i) Isaiah tells us that during Christ’s reign there will be peace, “They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. Then in that day the nations will resort to the root of Jesse, who will stand as a signal for the peoples; and His resting place will be glorious” (Isa. 11:9-10).
 - (ii) And there will be prosperity: “But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem *for* rejoicing and her people *for* gladness. I will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people; and there will no longer be heard in her the voice of weeping and the sound of crying. No longer will there be in it an infant *who lives but a few days*, or an old man who does not live out his days; for the youth will die at the age of one hundred and the one who does not reach the age of one hundred will be *thought* accursed. They will build houses and inhabit *them*; they will also plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They will not build and another inhabit, they will not plant and another eat; for as the lifetime of a

tree, *so will be* the days of My people, and My chosen ones will wear out the work of their hands” (Isa. 65:18-22).

- (iii) Since Scripture says these things will happen during the reign of Christ, and since His reign ends at His Second Coming, these things must take place before He returns.
- (iv) This should motivate us to serve Him even more fervently.

B. Preview.

1. Sadly, these blessings did not continue in Israel nor in Judah for long, not even to the end of Solomon’s reign.
 - a. Towards the end of his life, Solomon began to compromise: he began worshiping false gods because he had married so many foreign wives.
 - b. In doing this, he sowed the seeds of division in his kingdom and the eventual exile of Judah to Babylon.
2. But this was part of God’s plan: He didn’t intend for this situation to continue.
 - a. This kingdom and its glory wasn’t the reality; it only pointed to it.
 - b. It had to decline so that God’s people would look for a better kingdom; it had to be taken out of the way to make room for another kingdom.
 - c. The Lord has a purpose for everything He allows, even the bad things.
 - d. He works all things together for the good of His people and the advancement of His kingdom.
3. This morning, let’s consider two things:
 - a. First, the glory God gave to Israel began to decline in the days of Solomon and continued to do so to the end of that kingdom.
 - b. And second, the reason it did, was that the Lord was preparing the way for something better, for the reality in Christ.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, let’s consider that the glory God gave to Israel began to decline in the days of Solomon and continued to the end of that kingdom.
 1. At the time of Solomon, the kingdom had reached its fullness – like the moon at full phase – the Lord had blessed them on every side, as we’ve seen. But it soon began to move away from that fullness – like the moon in its phases – until it was eclipsed – like the new moon.
 - a. This began towards the end of Solomon’s reign when he turned to idolatry.
 - (i) The wisest of all kings disobeyed God by marrying many foreign wives as part of his treaties with other nations – something God told him not to do.
 - (ii) These wives – being from other nations and serving other gods – turned his heart away from the Lord – something the Lord warned him would happen.
 - b. The result was, the glory began to depart:

- (i) When we sin, we quench and grieve His Spirit and the Lord begins to withdraw from us.
 - (ii) As Solomon turned from the Lord, things began to darken.
- 2. After he died, the kingdom was divided and declined even further.
 - a. Ten of the twelve tribes revolted and withdrew from the house of David.
 - b. Jeroboam, the ten tribes' new king, turned them away from the true worship of God which was at Jerusalem.
 - (i) He set up two golden calves, one at Bethel and one in Dan through which to worship God (the same sin the Israelites committed at Mount Sinai).
 - (ii) When Jeroboam fought against Judah, 500,000 of Israel's choice men of war were killed, a loss from which they never fully recovered.
 - c. During Ahab's reign, they fell into more serious idolatry when he introduced the worship of Baal.
 - (i) While they pretended to worship the true God through the golden calves – something which God had forbidden [Second Commandment] – they began worshipping a false god.
 - (ii) Sadly, Baal worship was also introduced into the southern kingdom when Jehoram married Athaliah, Ahab's daughter – be careful what family you marry into.
- 3. Because of this spiritual declension, the Lord began to cut off parts of Israel.
 - a. Hazael, king of Syria, conquered all Israel east of the Jordan during the days of Jehu (2 Kings 10:32-33).
 - b. Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, captured the northern parts of Israel during the days of Pekah, king of Israel (2 Kings 15:29).
 - c. All the northern kingdom was finally defeated and carried away by Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, during the days of Hoshea, king of Israel, in 721 BC (2 Kings 18).
- 4. The same thing happened to the southern kingdom because of their apostasy.
 - a. The Babylonians came against them in 605, 598 and again 586, and carried them away into exile.
 - b. Some returned in 536 under Zerubbabel, and in 445 with Nehemiah, but most of them remained in Babylon.
 - c. From that time on, they were subject to the kings of Persia, then the Greeks, then the Romans.
 - d. When Jesus finally came, they were still under Rome and their Jewish leaders had become corrupt: There were only a few righteous who were waiting and looking for the coming of the Messiah.
 - e. From the glory of the days of Solomon, the church had declined to this state.
- B. Second, the reason the Lord allowed it to decline, was that He was preparing the way for something better, for the kingdom of His Son. As the moon, when it becomes aligned with the sun can hardly be seen when the sun rises – a new moon

– so the glory of the kingdom of Israel eclipsed as the sun of Christ’s kingdom arose.

1. The glory of God’s grace could be seen in the Old Covenant, but the glory of the God’s grace in the New is so much greater that the Old had none in comparison.
 - a. John writes, “For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ” (John 1:16-17).
 - b. Paul writes, “For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses *it*. For if that which fades away *was* with glory, much more that which remains *is* in glory” (2 Cor. 3:9-11).
 - (i) The glory of the Old had to diminish that the glory of the New might eclipse it. As John the Baptist, the last and greatest of the Old Covenant prophets – who also represented the Old Covenant prophets in God’s kingdom – said of Jesus, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).
 - (ii) The Old Covenant was only preparatory to the New, and by the time the New came, the Old was ready to vanish away, just as the light of the stars vanish when the sun rises.
2. Because of this decline in the spiritual state of Israel at the time Christ, God’s glory in the Gospel also became much more obvious.
 - a. We read in Matthew’s Gospel, “The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, and those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a light dawned. From that time Jesus began to preach and say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (4:16-17). As we noted earlier, there was only a small handful of godly people who were looking for the Messiah.
 - b. Because of this darkness, Christ’s light was much more conspicuous.
 - (i) Those of Israel could see Christ much more clearly, which is one of the reasons the darkness persecuted Him so violently.
 - (ii) But it made His righteousness and truth stand out more clearly for the whole world to see, down to this day.

III. Application: The point is: the Lord often allows things to grow very dark before He breaks through with His glorious light, so that His grace will be all the more visible.

A. This was certainly true in His plan of redemption:

1. The Lord allowed Israel to go through spiritual decay before He brought revival.
 - a. We saw what Israel was like when He sent His Son: at the end of Jesus’ ministry, they killed Him – you can’t get much darker than that – but He rose again, and less than fifty days later, He poured out His Spirit in revival.
 - b. The Lord also sent revivals in the Old Testament – in the days of Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah, to keep things from going downhill too quickly and to be pictures of what would happen when Jesus came.
 - c. Before He sent them, things were very dark that His glory might shine.

2. The Lord has also allowed things to get very dark in history before He sent revivals for the same reason.
 - a. The Reformation, the Puritan era, the Great Awakening, the New York revival were all sent when things had become morally degenerate.
 - b. Things are very dark right now, and so what may the Lord be planning?
 - (i) Perhaps a revival to keep things from deteriorating too quickly?
 - (ii) Perhaps a revival to show us how powerful and glorious Christ's reign will yet be?
 - (iii) Perhaps the Lord will break through with the blessings He has promised under the reign of His Son.
 - (iv) We need to be praying for revival, that the Lord Jesus would wield His sovereign authority to reverse these dark times and advance His kingdom.
- B. But one other thing we should consider is that what the Lord does on a large scale, He also does on an individual level:
1. He often allows us to go through difficult times before He brings relief, so that the glory of His grace will shine all the more.
 - a. Job went through enough suffering and loss to break most men; but the Lord sustained him and eventually returned to him in great blessing.
 - b. King David was chased through the wilderness by Saul, who tried to kill him several times, before the Lord established his kingdom over Israel.
 - c. The Lord will often bring you through difficult times when He is planning to glorify Himself in your life.
 - d. Don't despair, but trust in His kindness, if you are a believer this morning.
 2. If you're not, realize the Lord often brings those He's intending to save to the very end of their resources before He breaks through with His grace.
 - a. Paul was a very wicked man – he tried to destroy the church of God – before the Lord converted him.
 - b. None of us would argue that the man with the Legion could have been much worse than he was, before the Lord converted him.
 - c. The Lord doesn't make everyone hit rock bottom before He saves them, but He often does. Sometimes it's necessary to humble a man before he sees his need of the Lord.
 - d. Does He need to humble you, before you will see your need of Him? If you don't know Him this morning, pray that He will humble you that you might be saved before you perish in your sins. Amen.