



WINTER SUNSET DEVOTIONAL

PSALM 113:3

“Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time forth and forevermore! From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the LORD is to be praised!”

EXPERIENCE

A week ago, I took a couple hours between afternoon projects and an evening meeting to hit the slopes with my oldest son. It was a bittersweet point of connection just before he left to return to college. Bitter because of having to say goodbye and because of the bitter cold—the wind chill was brutal! Skiing in copious amounts of powdery snow was sweet! What made this brief adventure even sweeter was the gorgeous sunset we enjoyed together (pictured above). The setting sun was emblematic of Colton’s winter break coming to an end. Still, the beauty of the sunset and the joy of time together overshadowed the discomforts and the sadness. If I had not carved out time amidst my busy workday, if we had succumbed to

the temptation to skip the experience because of the cold, we would have missed the joy and the beauty of the whole experience.

CONTEMPLATION

The rich beauty of the setting sun is magnified by the presence of clouds and snow. It is common enough for onlookers to remark about the importance of clouds to enhance the attractiveness of a sunset. It is also common for people to complain about the cold and to let the frigid weather inhibit them from getting outdoors to enjoy the winter sunsets to their fullest extent. That afternoon the clouds did provide more beauty, and the chilly temperatures made possible the snow-white foreground and the frosted trees that further complimented the sunset's glory. In like manner, Christians experience a deeper richness of joy in life as God sovereignly mingles many satisfying experiences with clouds of discouragement and bitter afflictions. God's grace disguised in the clouds and the cold of believers' lives can easily go unrecognized. Yet, the Lord perfectly ordains and aligns all hardships to maximize the joy, beauty, and glory of his redemptive purposes just as he perfectly ordains the weather conditions that result in stunning sunsets.

Full disclosure—I did grumble about the cold a few times while coming up the chairlift, and I did openly lament my son's imminent departure. However, meditation on the sunset drew me back to the joy, beauty, and glory of the present moment. Praise of God's majesty spilled from my lips as Colton and I contemplated the Lord's character and his goodness to us. We delighted in God's blessings as the sun departed the sky and we drove home.

The ingredients of that precious moment were a snowy sunset, some mild discouragement, slight affliction, sweet conversation with my firstborn, and a few trips down the ski hill all mixed by the hand of our sovereign God—and the end product was praise! These ingredients are not altogether that different from what we observe in Psalm 113. In just nine verses the Psalmist, among other ingredients, includes the setting sun (v.3), the sovereignty of God (vv.4-6), significant discouragement and affliction (vv.7-9), sitting with princes (v. 8 - not quite as glorious as skiing), and the sweet love of parent and child (v.9) to remind all servants of the LORD that: “From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the LORD is to be praised!” Yet, for those who are poor (v.7), for the wife who is barren (v.9), and for a myriad of other believers suffering from discouragement and afflictions, this statement about praise is a tough exhortation. In the midst of difficult life circumstances, praise can often seem more like a spiritual discipline for Christ-followers than a delight. Nonetheless, during these hard moments, it is best for all believers to practice praise, especially when they feel uninspired. Praise is an act of remembering God’s character, his promises, and the sure and certain hope we have in him.

As we watch the sun go down each day, regardless of the extent of our poverty of spirit, barrenness of soul, or any physical circumstance, we can still praise the LORD. Beautiful sunsets on a wintry day, no matter how bitter cold, remind God’s servants of his glory, his sovereignty, his goodness, and the joy-filled delight he has in his children. Indeed, the sun will rise again, and God is always at work redeeming what is poor, burnt, broken, and barren. In the meantime, let us enjoy the beauty of the sun’s light while it is visible and praise the name of the LORD our God.

PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, you have made the setting of the sun mixed with some clouds and a snow-covered landscape to be a unique glimpse of beauty and glory. These types of sunsets radiate tender mercy and overflowing joy, reminding your people of those qualities of your character. Might seeing these types of sunsets prompt our hearts to delight to praise you for your beauty, for your mercy, for your sovereignty, for your goodness, and for your joy. We bless your name, O Lord. Amen.

CONFIRMATION

Sunsets have many emblematic connections in Scripture. They represent the end of the day, but also the approaching of the end of time when the Lord will judge the earth. They are connected with God's beauty (Psalm 50:1-2) and God's joy (Psalm 19:5-6 & 65:8). Sunsets communicate that all things end in praise of the glory of God (Malachi 1:11). The setting sun is also the latter half of a bookended day that reminds believers of the glory of God and the exhortation to praise him, as well as his worthiness to be worshipped. On God-ordained occasions the circumstances are right for extra special displays of beauty and glory. On those days, the skies shout for joy.



Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

From Sermon #1182

“I watched a glorious sunset, marveling at the beauty wherewith the evening skies were all ablaze, and adoring Him who gave them their matchless coloring. On the next evening I resorted to the same spot, hoping to be again enraptured with the gorgeous

pomp of the ending day, but there were no clouds, and therefore, no glories. True, the canopy of sapphire was there, but no magnificent array of clouds to form golden masses with edges of burning crimson, or islands of loveliest hue set in a sea of emerald, there were no great conflagrations of splendor or flaming peaks of mountains of fire. The sun was as bright as before, but for lack of dark clouds on which to pour out his luster his magnificence was unrevealed. A man who should live and die without trials would be like a setting sun without clouds, he would have scant opportunity for the display of those virtues with which the grace of God had endowed him.”¹

¹ <https://www.spurgeongems.org/sermon/chs1182.pdf>