

THE SERMONS, LECTURES AND SONGS OF SIDNEY EDWARD COX

Editorial Note: This is one lesson of a 14-lesson weekly series of Bible studies that Sidney Cox delivered to the congregation of the Eastlake Alliance Church in Birmingham, Alabama in late 1972 and early 1973.



This is a 2011 picture of what was the Eastlake Alliance Church in 1972. It is located at the intersection of 3rd Avenue North and 85th Street in Birmingham and is the current home of the 46th Street Baptist Church.

In 1972, at age 84, Sidney Cox had moved from Detroit, Michigan to Birmingham, Alabama to be near my parents, John and Jean Cox. Still remarkably healthy and independent, he lived in a small efficiency apartment on Birmingham's south side. His beloved wife, Violet had earlier passed away in 1967 while they were residing in Detroit.

From the time of their commissioning in Toronto, Canada in 1910/1912 to 1944, Sidney and Violet Cox had a well-chronicled career as Salvation Army officers – a journey that took them across the breadth of Canada and ultimately to Atlanta, Georgia in 1928 to be part of the founding of The Salvation Army's Southern Territory.

However, during the latter part of his life, Sidney Cox had developed a close relationship with the Christian and Missionary Alliance (“CMA”). CMA operates as a vast network of churches, similar to a “denomination.” During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Sidney had served as Professor of New Testament at two Bible institutes – The Miami Bible Institute and The Toccoa Falls Bible Institute (Toccoa, Georgia). These two institutes were principally supported by CMA and graduates often entered pastorates at CMA churches.

During this era of his life, Sidney Cox remained in great demand as a preacher, evangelist and Bible teacher both in Salvation Army and CMA venues. The Eastlake Alliance Church was a CMA church and they took advantage of his residency in Birmingham by engaging him to teach this series. The pastor of the church was Glen Tingley, Jr.

John Douglas Cox, grandson of Sidney Cox. December 29, 2008.

**Gospel of John
Part 10
Through the Dark Curtains
February 25, 1973**

Sunday School at East Lake Alliance Church Birmingham, Alabama. Lesson Number 022573.

This is Glen Tingley, Jr. welcoming you to this Sunday School Class. Our teacher, Dr. Sidney Cox, is continuing a study in the Gospel of John.

The chalkboard contains the following information:

“The Gospel of John.”

“Different.”

“Through the Dark Curtains.”

Let us now listen to this study with Dr. Cox.

I want us to say together our theme scripture because it has a significance for the lesson that we have in mind for this morning. I want you to say together the first five verses of the first chapter of John and listen for that word “darkness”. Now you notice what the subject is this morning, “Through the Dark Curtains.” Now that’s what we are going to be thinking about, and as we say this theme scripture together, listen for that word “darkness” because that’s the thing we’re going to be looking at for a little while. Alright, everybody together,

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.”

Now, at that moment dear, we pressed a button, we turned a light on and that is a strange word because the button we’ve touched to turn the light on is called “darkness” and we touched the button right then. Now, one of the things we’ve said is this, “What we are is more important than what we do. What we are is more important than what we do,” because dear, if there is any tendency to slip down into the valley again, it won’t be because of your activity, it will be because there is a lack in our adoration. Now that is the other thing we’ve reminded ourselves of is that, “Adoration is more important than activity.” “What we are is more important than what we do; and adoration is more important than activity; and worship is more important than work.”

And now again, thinking of the Gospel of John, I found myself with the 4th chapter of John and the Woman of Samaria in mind as I was pondering and thinking and so on. This thought came to me. You see what you think of it and whether we could investigate something together. When our Lord is talking with the Woman of Samaria, He said, “God is a spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” And then He went on to say, “And the Father seeketh such to worship Him.” The Father is looking for folks who will worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Now, do you know any other place in the Bible where it says, “The Father seeketh such?” Now there may be, but I haven’t found it. You’ll find the Son seeking to save that which is lost. He is the Good Shepherd that goes out seeketh the wandering sheep. I’m not speaking of that. The Holy Spirit seeking folks who will give Him the right of way in their lives, that’s something what we often think about; but the actual words, “The Father seeking somebody.” What kind of folks is He seeking? What? He’s seeking such that will worship Him in spirit and in truth. If you come across a phrase that indicates the Father is seeking, because if I could get 2 or 3 of those, I’d have the outline of a sermon. You see, you never can tell what might happen to it. But it would be wonderful, wouldn’t it to find out what kind of folks the Father is seeking, looking for. The Father.

Now, let’s come now to our lesson because this is something that I’m hoping will be of some value to you personally as well as a bit of information that you get out of a class. One of the distinctions of the Gospel of John is this, that at the beginning of every chapter you find some dark picture and you can go from one end to the other and find it inevitably. We shall only touch 2 or 3 just as illustrations, but you will find at the beginning of the chapter a darkness - some dark picture of human need, and then as if the Holy Spirit is saying to us, “I want you to see the Lord Jesus to the best advantage. I want you to see this lovely picture of Him in the clearest possible light and so I’m going to hang a dark curtain,” and then you will find as you watch, He steps through the curtain and then up against that dark background, you can see His loveliness all the clearer.

Now dear, if you went to a photographer to get your photograph taken, what would he do? Well, he’d look you over first of all to see what kind of a charismatic Christian person he had there, the makeup, and then he’d hang a background and against that background your picture would be seen to the best advantage. Now, the greatest photographer that ever was in existence is not a man at all, it’s the Holy Spirit and the great picture that He is taking and showing to us is how lovely the Lord Jesus is; and so in the Gospel of John where He is doing this more clearly than any place else in the scripture, He says, “I want you to see Him. I want you to see Him against this background of darkness there, and I want you to see Him step through the darkness, and I want you to see Him meet the problem that causes the darkness,” because whenever darkness comes it is because of some, now listen to it, some personal problem.

Now, you will find that you’re photograph is here through the Gospel of John because the things that we see at the beginning of these chapters are the things we’re acquainted with. We know about them ourselves.

Now with that thought, let’s start at the first chapter and don’t forget what we’re looking for. Here’s a curtain. Here’s a dark background and now you watch the Lord Jesus step through the curtain with the answer to the problem and the grace for the need. Now you watch Him. And

we did a moment ago something that is very important because it led us to the word “darkness,” and the darkness is there, “And the light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not.”

Now notice dear, because it not only tells us the fact of the darkness but what kind of darkness. It’s a darkness that has to do with our comprehension. Now that’s the first problem that God faces when He undertakes the work that only God can do, the saving of a sinner dead in trespasses and sin; and God undertakes the task of saving a sinner like that. Now the first problem is the sinner is wrong in his thinking. Now it may be that we say to ourselves, a sinner is first wrong in his actions, but we don’t have to do much thinking to know that an action is always the product of a thought; and so we find somebody here and here is the darkness. Not just the fact that he is in darkness, but his darkness is described for us.

One of the most difficult things that any of us ever undertake, and it is always a failure, is to try to convince a sinner that he’s wrong in his thinking about this and that and the other. Now only the Holy Spirit can do that and sometimes in our effort to make the gospel clear to somebody or other, we undertake to try to convince a sinner that he’s wrong in his thinking about certain things because he always says, “Because I think it’s right, I’m going do it. Because I think it is advantageous, I’m going to do it. Because it is something I like, I’m going do it. And that is always the thinking there.

So here, the first glimpse of the darkness is somebody wrong in his thinking. The darkness comprehended it not; and don’t forget, dear, that when we talk about darkness, we’re not talking about some thing at all, we’re talking about someone. And if you turn to Ephesians 5:8, you will find words there like this, “But ye were sometimes darkness.” Not you were in darkness, you were darkness. “But now, I light in the Lord.” Not you are in the light, but you are light. You are the lamp. Not just the light the lamp throws out. You are the lamp. And as somebody wrong in his thinking, you go down the chapter and you’ll find the darkness deepening; and you will find somebody who was in the world and the world was made by Him and the world knew Him not, you see.

Now, your comprehension has gone further down because it is as a man thinketh not in his head but in his heart that he is. That’s the thing that makes us what we are. Not merely our thinking up here but our thinking in our hearts, in the very center, the focal point of our being. What we think there, “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.”¹ So there is darkness there. And then, when you turn to the next verse, verse 11 as we are going along, you will find the darkness deepening again, because it says, “He came unto His own and His own received Him not.” Exactly, you see. Comprehended Him not, knew Him not, received Him not.

Now, he’s darkness. This is the picture of the man, and I know the man’s name. I’ve known his name for a long time. I’ve lived with him for as long as somebody lived or was in the 14th chapter of Joshua, but I’ve lived with this man a long time. His name is Sidney Cox. That’s his name - this man who couldn’t comprehend; this man who didn’t know; this man whose will, his volition was set against God so that when He came, he received him not, you see? Now there is darkness.

¹ Proverbs 23:7.

Now, we've got the dark curtain. Now you watch, because this is what the Holy Spirit wants us to do. He wants us to watch while somebody steps through that curtain; and He does; and when you catch sight of Him it is almost breathtaking in the wonder of it; and something happens the moment He steps through the curtain. Something happens and our old lack of comprehension, it seems to disappear; and the know not disappears; and the receive Him not gives place to receive Him – "For as many as receive Him to them gives he the right to become the sons of God."²

And we've watched the Lord Jesus step through a curtain, a curtain with its three-fold darkness - comprehension, knowing, receiving – it's all there, just like we were. In fact, it is a picture of us and He steps through the curtain and instead of darkness there is light. And you know, you can only see the magnificence of the Lord Jesus as you watch Him against the total darkness of man in his sin and the wonder of the Lord of glory coming to save that man from his sin. When you see him that way, you see Jesus in His ultimate glory and beauty. You don't see all of Jesus when you watch His fingers flinging stars into space. You don't see all of Jesus when you watch His fingers bringing the bulbs up in the spring time. _____. But watch, you watch Him as he goes out after somebody, somebody like me, who was totally dark in comprehension, totally dark in knowing, totally dark in receiving and He comes and reaches me. Now that's the moment when you see Jesus in all of his glory.

Now, here at the beginning, right at the beginning of the Gospel of John you've got that picture. You've got that, our Lord stepping through the curtain and something happens doesn't it, it surely does. Something happens with these eyes of ours that couldn't see and, "We are born not of blood or of the will of the flesh but of the will of God."³ We are born of God and our eyes are open and we see His glory and grace and truth, the 14th verse, and we see Jesus stepping through a curtain.

Do you like Him? Isn't He wonderful? Isn't He wonderful? See. And when we say deep down in our hearts, "That's what He did for me," now that puts the cap on it doesn't it? Not just what He could do for others, but what He did for me.

Now, when you go to the 2nd chapter, you find there's darkness again. It doesn't look like it because at the beginning of the 2nd chapter, you've got the wedding at Cana of Galilee and there shouldn't be darkness at a wedding, but there was. I don't mean in the folks who were getting married, not at all, but there is somebody else there beside the folks getting married, a very important part of any wedding, and that is the folks who look after the details of it, the host and hostess at a wedding. Now, these are the people that are before us. The bride and bridegroom are not even mentioned. We know that there was a wedding at Cana of Galilee but we don't know anything about the bride and we don't know anything about the bridegroom. Nobody knows anything about a bridegroom anyhow. I mean you just have to have him around some how or other, but nobody ever sings, "Here comes the bridegroom," and here he is.

² John 1:12.

³ John 1:13.

But there is somebody else and we do see them and we see them not with a smile on their faces but with deep anxiety because a domestic problem had arisen. They had failed at the point of hospitality. Now that to us is not an important matter at all because if we found ourselves in that predicament, well, there is a delicatessen around the corner and we can get something from somebody; but here our host and hostess at a wedding had failed at the point of hospitality. They had failed to provide adequate refreshment for those who had been invited; and that, my dear, in an eastern land is the unpardonable sin. Now whatever it is now, back in those days, it was so dreadful that if somebody hadn't stepped through the dark curtain of their domestic problem and solved it for them, those folks would've had to leave that community all together. They could never have lived down the disgrace of it.

Now that's a problem that happens in a home, a domestic problem. And you see what our Lord did. He stepped through the curtain and the water blushed in the presence of its creator and became wine. Now, the dark curtain again. Here it is - the darkness, and this time it is a domestic darkness. Don't forget that the first one was, what we are by nature. Now from what we are by nature, the picture moves into our home, anybody's home because a darkness can arise in any home. It may not be the same one. It will seldom be the same one. But here is a darkness that appeared within the circle of a home and it affected the folks in there, and through the dark curtain of a domestic difficulty our Lord steps.

Now, when you go to the third chapter, you see what we are doing, when you go to the third chapter of John you don't have to look far for the darkness, do you? Because here is somebody who comes to Jesus by night. Now, here is another kind of darkness, what we are by nature, our lostness, the darkness that could appear in a home; and now, I almost said a darkness that's worse than any of them. I think in a sense that is correct if you say this: it is the most difficult kind of darkness to deal with, and it is religious darkness - the darkness that comes when religion is there and grips the person and masters him instead of the light of God's salvation.

Here's a man who was totally religious. He was magnificent, *the* teacher in Israel, not just a teacher. In the original, there is the definite article there. He was *the* teacher in Israel. He was the chairman of the board of deacons of the temple. Now I know I'm wrong there, but you know what I mean, don't you? But there it is. He was the one. If anybody wanted to know anything of the intricacies of Judaistic Law, all they had to do was to ask Nicodemus. No one ever whispered about Nicodemus, no one. What he believed on the inside was seen in the magnificence of his legal righteousness on the outside. No one ever whispered about him. No one ever said, "Did you see where Nicodemus was last night?" No one ever said that. No one ever said, "Did you see who was with him last night?" No one ever said that. Here was a man, magnificent.

You know, some of those old Pharisees put us to shame, don't they? Because you look at a man like Nicodemus, you look at a man like the Rich Young Ruler, who said in answer to the Lord Jesus' question, "All these things have I kept from my youth up." I couldn't say that and neither could you. Not at all.

You take the Apostle Paul, 3rd chapter of Philippians where he said, "I was touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." Why, I couldn't say that and neither could you, but he could. They had a legal righteousness that was magnificent. Wonderful. And yet, it was totally unacceptable in the eyes of God. It was totally unacceptable, and the Lord Jesus stepped

through the darkness of the legal righteousness and the religious coverings of a man, and said to him, “Ye must be born again.” He stepped right through and pushed the curtains on one side; and you know, that’s the way the Lord Jesus steps through the curtain of any sinner’s darkness whether it be religious or otherwise. The new birth is the light, the lamp that He had in his hand as he stepped through the darkness that was enveloping the life of this man, Nicodemus. He stepped through the darkness, and it was wonderful because Nicodemus was the one who heard for the first time, it was in that conversation that our Lord said to a man and who had heard it for the first time. The light of it all, and He said to him, now what, “For God so loved the world.” There’s the light, you see.

Now dear, we’ve got a darkness of what we are by nature; we’ve got a domestic difficulty; we’ve got the most difficult thing to deal with, a religious difficulty; and when you turn to the 4th chapter of the Gospel of John, you find another kind of difficulty, and you don’t have to look far for it there, do we. The sun was in the heavens at that 6th hour, but a woman was by a well, wrapped in the smelly garments of our own personal iniquity. And she was there. Now, what’s He going to do about that? What’s He going to do about that? This is something else. This is something else. What will He do?

Well, He steps through the darkness and leads her out gently step by step from something she did not know to something that He knew; from the known to the unknown; a well on the outside, a well on the inside; a satisfaction for a moment, and a satisfaction forever. “If you drink of the water that I shall give you, you shall never thirst; but it shall be in you, a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”

And so you’ve got the darkness by nature; and you’ve got a domestic darkness, the darkness that could come in a home. You’ve got the religious darkness that is seen in each and every church. We’ve got the darkness of personal sin. And then, when you go to the next chapter, you find a man who has been ill for 30 and 8 years; and he’s never been able to get into that Pool of Bethesda at just the right moment. Now, here’s darkness – not only a physical darkness, but the deeper darkness of a constant, almost endless, hopeless disappointment. I wonder how many times he’d gone home with his heart just blackened out because of the disappointment that he was not able to get in at just the right moment. So, you’ve got a physical difficulty.

Now you know what happened there, and our Lord steps through, and in a moment or two you see this man, deep in his darkness with his bed on his shoulder and a song in his heart, and the darkness has turned to light.

Now, you can go on and on and on. I’m not going to do it because we haven’t got time to start with; but I wanted to leave a thought with you. As one of these that has to do with the distinctions, the differences of the Gospel of John. The distinction of a dark curtain, through which the Lord Jesus steps with the light for the darkness, the healing for the physical need, the grace and blood to cover the personal iniquity, to bring light into the midst of a religious darkness, the solution for a home problem, and the solution to what we are by nature – what we are; because the big problem with all of us is not what we have done, or what we have not done, it’s what we are. That’s the big problem.

And so, you find a dark curtain here and our Lord steps through; and you find a dark curtain here and our Lord steps through.

Now, this is a class and we're just talking together. But, it's more than that, isn't it? Because if it was just a class, you don't have to be in this room with this group of people to know that we're not just in a class. We have been brought together in this fashion because the Lord had something to say to us and He could say it to us perhaps better in the quietness of this class than any other way - what we are by nature, God has the solution for it. Is there any domestic difficulty that you know anything about? Now, there's nobody listening to us. Not at all. Any problem there? There's somebody dear who can step through the darkness, no matter what it is. No matter how deep that darkness is - religious darkness; the darkness of personal iniquity - and I'm not talking now of course about iniquity on the outside, but something that's on the inside; the darkness of a physical problem; and you will be amazed as you go through, if you haven't caught this before, you will be amazed if you go through the Gospel of John and find at the beginning of practically every chapter, a darkness and the wonderful way in which the Lord steps through the curtain with the answer to the need.

A little boy with five loaves and fishes - John 6, and the little boy with the loaves and fishes was the one who held the light. The darkness in Chapter 7, and our Lord steps through and says, "If any man thirsts, let him come unto me and drink. A woman taken in her sin in Chapter 8. The man born blind in Chapter 9. The thief breaking in to the sheepfold in Chapter 10, because don't forget dear, that the Chapter 10 does not begin immediately with the picture of the Good Shepherd. It begins with the darkness of a sheepfold menaced by an intruding robber. That's where it begins. And you go to the 11th chapter and you've got Lazarus in the grave. Has He got their answer to that? The mystery, the awfulness, the hopelessness of death?

Now, you go through for your own heart and you will find in every chapter a picture that, if we are not familiar with it already, we will be someday. We will be someday.

Now, that's our message for this morning. Now, from now on in our classes, or for a little while at any rate, I want us to take a look at some of the individual chapters and take a good look at them. Now, we've been traveling a definite pathway, we know where we've been heading and we're going to continue on the same line; we're going to find out what our Lord is in various chapters. For instance, the next time we meet together, I want us to take a look at the big picture in Chapter 2 - it's the picture of our Lord cleansing the temple. And then a little later, I want us to take a look at that Chapter 5 where we find Him, "The Judgment of God." And then I want us to stop a little while and look at Him as, "The Bread of Life." Now this will be the path that we shall be traveling, and I'm hoping it'll be some help to you and through you to somebody else; because don't forget, that one of the big things that Paul said to Timothy was, "That which you have heard, you pass on to somebody else, that they in turn may be able to teach others also."

Our Father we thank Thee for the loveliness of this room and our gathering together around the Word of God. We pray that something may have been absorbed into our being that will be of value to us as we seek to do the great thing Thou hast given us to do - just the task of living the Christian life. Bless these dear ones we pray and those who belong to them. In Jesus name. Amen.