**John Milton (1608-1674)**

**Sonnet XIX: When I Consider How my Light is Spent**

**When I consider how my light is spent,**

**Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,**

**And that one Talent which is death to hide**

**Lodged with me useless, though my Soul more bent**

**To serve therewith my Maker, and present**

**My true account, lest he returning chide;**

**“Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?”**

**I fondly ask. But patience, to prevent**

**That murmur, soon replies, “God doth not need**

**Either man’s work or his own gifts; who best**

**Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state**

**Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed**

**And post o’er Land and Ocean without rest:**

**They also serve who only stand and wait.”**

**Historical factors:**

John Milton went blind in 1651 due to glaucoma, though this did not keep him from

writing. He wrote this sonnet, "When I consider how my light is spend," as a meditation on his blindness.

**Analysis:**

At first glance it might seem that Milton is being metaphorical in this sonnet, but looking back at the historical factors of when he wrote this shows that he is talking about the literal lack of light in his life now that he is blind when he speaks of "how [his] light is spent" and that now his world is very literally dark for him.

Milton desires more to serve God, and ponders whether it's possible to do works for Him in the darkness, and whether God would punish him for not being able to use his poetic talent. This references the story in the New Testament of the man who buried his "talent" (a coin used in Israel) instead of using it to earn more, and he was punished for wasting such an opportunity. This is similar to Milton's fear about whether he was wasting his talent to write poetry.

This is the point when an inner dialogue with himself emerges in the sonnet, when "Patience" (or his inner voice) responds to this thought by saying God doesn't need the physical works of men, He has His own power and the Angels in Heaven to do as he wishes, and that those who stay strong and wait through the trials in their lives will be rewarded in Heaven.

It seems as if in this sonnet that Milton is working through his personal discouragement as a result of his blindness, and through his faith in God he helps to lift himself up through this challenge to see the now metaphorical light which is that God will get him through even this.

**Contributor:**

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