

**Sermon preached by Mr F. L. Gosden at Galeed Chapel, Brighton,
Lord's Day Evening 6th October 1963**

"To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me." Acts 26 v. 18

Mark closes his gospel with the disciples going forth and preaching "everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by signs following" (Mk 16 v. 20). Well, that is in this chapter, and the "signs following" are in the text. And sometimes we pray (and I know some of you pray) "that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified" (2 Thes. 3 v. 1); also "Let Thy work appear unto Thy servants, and Thy glory unto their children" (Ps. 90 v. 16). Answers to this prayer will give us the text: 'to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light.'

Real conversion is a radical change; that is, a change at the very root, a change in the nature. It is to be created a new creature in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5 v. 17) and those who have been taught what they are in the ruin of the fall realise for themselves that nothing less than a new creation will be of any use. The leprosy is deep. It is in the very walls of the house, and the house must come down (Lev. 14 v. 34-5). Well then, this is the main design of the Lord, the Head of the Church, in the ministry of the gospel; and if this is so we might ask ourselves, with all our hearings and with all our preaching, as to whether there is any real evidence that these effects of the preaching of the gospel have taken effect in our own hearts. What a solemn thing it is for those who have attended the services of God's house (and it is a good thing to attend the means of grace) but who live all their lives and have no real evidence that the text has been accomplished in their souls! Also, what a dreadful thing for a minister, after all the thousands of sermons that he has preached, if he has no evidence that his preaching has produced, by the Spirit, the text in the hearts of the people! So that there is a very real importance in these words: "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light."

Well, if our eyes have been opened, we shall realise that we were born blind, and that this blindness, this darkness, is really, in the nature of it, ignorance of God. And if we are ignorant of God we must be ignorant of ourselves, and how many thousands, millions, of our fellow-creatures live and die blind and in the darkness of unregeneracy! Yet, as we said this morning, there is a terrible sight of the carnal mind, of everything that is carnal! There can be astigmatism in the natural eye which sees nothing as it should be seen. It makes straight things to look crooked. It puts bitter for sweet, death for life. Where should we be if our eyes had not been opened? Therefore "it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed" (Lam. 3 v. 22).

'To turn them from darkness to light.' It is the power of darkness, a darkness which envelops the whole mind and soul. Well, my friends, do you remember the time when you could see nothing of a spiritual kind, and wanted to see nothing different from what the natural eye could see? What cause you have to thank God if you have been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into his marvellous light (Col. 1 v. 13)! Peter gives reasons for thanksgiving on that behalf, where he says "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal

priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2 v. 9).

We would not go over the ground that we did this morning, but, as enabled, look at some of the effects of the Spirit through the preaching of the Gospel.

'And from the power of Satan unto God.' The power of Satan is second to the power of God. There is only one wisdom which is greater than the wisdom of sin and Satan, and that is the wisdom of grace; and Satan is that "strong man armed" which keepeth the heart of a natural man, unless a stronger than he should come and spoil him (Lk 11 v. 21-2). So that the world that lies in wickedness is taken captive by the devil at his will. His willing slaves – they think that they have liberty; they think that they are their own, and that they are independent, and look upon poor pilgrims in all their sufferings, in all their toils, in all their groanings, and see them to be a poor miserable company of people. But, says Moses, "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord" (Deut. 33 v. 29). And it is only in those in whose hearts faith is that can judge between people and people, that can "discern between him that serveth God, and him that serveth Him not" (Mal. 3 v. 18); and that is because the true Light shines. If our eyes have been opened and the truth has been revealed to us, it sets up a standard in our hearts, in our consciences, a standard of discernment, and we see light in God's light, and estimate things at God's valuation; and it makes Christ precious.

When the eyes of Moses were opened he saw that a portion of Christ among His dear people was greater treasure than the riches and honour and luxuries of Pharaoh's court. It was because his eyes were opened; he saw light in God's light (Ps. 36 v. 9); and a blessed sight it was, no doubt. He was noted a fool – a fool to give up such honours, comforts, luxuries and riches – turn his back on it, on the Royal Court – and associate himself with the poor afflicted people of God, to be carried to the back side of the mountains, and to be there for nearly forty years. Oh, if we are called by divine grace, my friends, it will make a radical change in our person and our life! We shall see different spiritual objects. The Word of God will be seen in a different light from how it was once seen.

'From the power of Satan unto God.' Have you known the power of Satan? We shall know it all the days of our life; we shall never be delivered absolutely from the influence of the devil and his temptations while we live here. The Canaanites did dwell in the land, and when one is called by grace the old man of sin is not eradicated. We shall never be anything better than sinners in ourselves. But, blessed be God, if you are in that sacred place of the Most High, if our names "are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21 v. 27), then death, which puts an end to our lives, will put an end to sin. As we were reading, "As sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life" (Rom. 5 v. 21).

Oh what a mercy it is to be delivered from the power of Satan! He has everything in the fallen heart of man to work upon. He sets the whole nature on fire. The existence of sin is evident; you see it in every town, in every street, in every house, in every heart. Oh the terrible consequences of sin! Sin is indefinable, inexpressible, but its existence and its power are known in the hearts of those who are convinced of it by the law of God.

'To deliver them from the power of Satan' - and to bring them under the power of God. Oh, this is a point, a point that is outstanding with regard to hope, and it will help the vilest sinner out of hell not to despair. But you will need these eyes to be opened, and the true light to shine and reveal the Lord Jesus, and for the Holy Spirit so to exercise grace in your heart as to dethrone this strong man armed, and to turn you from his power unto the power of God. Blessed change! And a comfort it is to have the assurance by the Spirit that there is One greater in righteousness and holiness than you are in sin and pollution. It is to me a very sacred point. It will keep a sinking sinner from sinking into despair. The Gospel sets this blessed One forth: "Him hath God exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5 v. 31).

'To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.' To *turn them unto God*. It shows that when the eyes are opened, and the heart is turned, instead of being turned towards the devil and walking in his darkness and death, the heart is turned toward God, toward His light, His life, His righteousness, His blessed gospel. What a different prospect! What a different object! What a refuge then is seen by a pursued and exposed sinner! What a Saviour to one who is lost! *From Satan, unto God.*

When I read of these things, and see what power the devil has in my own heart and in the world, how I turn this into a prayer for the people, and especially for the young! Oh that the Lord would make even one's so feeble and threadbare a ministry effective to this end, 'to open their eyes'! This is one main feature of the gathering together of His saints, and the provision that He has made in appointing the ministry of the Gospel.

I have been tempted that my religion is official, and that if I had not to preach I should take but very little interest in the Word of God. Oh, the devil does know how to apply his fiery darts! But I have been thankful for an answer to these accusations, when I call to remembrance former days" (Heb. 10 v. 32), when I trust that the Lord opened my ears and my eyes, when I sat in a pew and felt a sacred atmosphere in the house of God, when I was unknown and knew nobody. Oh, what sweet communion there was in those days! But "he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow" (Ecc. 1 v. 18). But there was no *official* religion in the beginning. I was unknown - a good thing too! Then you can turn to the devil and refer to the beginning and say 'Devil, was there anything official about that?' There was nothing official when Nathaniel was under the fig tree (John 1 v. 48-50), nothing very official with the publican in the Temple (Lk 16 v. 13-4). But they had their eyes opened, and this was the mighty power of God, a greater power, blessed be His Name! I should never have been able to have ventured here today if I did not believe that there was One greater than myself; and "if that God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8 v. 31)

Oh how blessed it is to be turned from the power, the devastating power, the consuming power, the ruining power of the devil, unto the blessed power of God's divine grace in the Gospel! Do you think so? Do you find any of these things moving in your heart? Is there any response to the preaching of the gospel as you sit and listen to it? There is something sweet in the feeling of it; you forget everybody else in the chapel, and there will be a real sense of the stretching forth the hands of your faith to embrace Him, as though you would say 'Lord Jesus, I want all of Thee – everything that Thou art; and I need wrought in

me everything that Thou hast done in the finished work of salvation; I need the whole of the Gospel. I believe, Lord, that it would fill me, that it would empty me of all that I am, and fill me with all that Thou art.' 'Turn them from the power of Satan unto' the power of 'God.'

Have we any evidence of it in our own souls? Are we Godward? Oh, it is a mercy to be Godward! You are safe, if you are. Whatever mysterious pathway you may walk in, you are safe if you are Godward; nothing will ever hurt you. No. And all this comes by the eyes of their understanding being enlightened (*Eph. 1 v. 18*) and turned from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God.

'That they may receive forgiveness of sins.' This is the greatest blessing. The forgiveness of sins contains everything, blessings without exception, in the Gospel. "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man" – through this *Man* – "is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins" (*Acts 13 v. 38*). It is by His sufferings, blood, and merit. The forgiveness of sins is not an act of naked omnipotence; it is a *work*: "for this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (*1 John 3 v. 8*); and He destroys the works of the devil in His people's hearts. 'The forgiveness of sins' – and we must receive this blessing if ever we go to heaven. No unforgiven sinner will enter there. It may be just that point in your experience that some of you feel to lack. You feel to love the Lord, to meet among His people, but to say that you have received the forgiveness of sins you feel you have no warrant. Well, the Lord came for that one purpose – to give Himself a sacrifice, "to bring in everlasting righteousness" (*Dan. 9 v. 24*), and I would not set you down short; I will not say that evidences will make up for lack of assurance of forgiveness; I will not say that your needs are an indubitable evidence of forgiveness; but I would say this, that if by the Spirit you have been taught what you are as a sinner, and you are brought to seek salvation through the redeeming blood of the Lord Jesus Christ,

*"The time of love will come,
When we shall clearly see
Not only that He shed His blood,
But each shall say, 'For me.'"*

(A Toplady; Gadsby's 330)

You may feel that you will never be blessed with that crowning blessing. It *is* a crowning blessing; it crowns the whole work of grace in the soul – forgiveness. But it is through this *Man*, the whole of the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, God's eternal Son, incarnate, coming into this world, and everything that He did in finishing the work that His Father gave Him to do in rendering to the law infinite satisfaction, in paying the very last mite of the debt that His people owed, bringing in an everlasting righteousness to be imputed to His people.

You have not to look into yourself for the grounds of forgiveness, but there are things in experience which accompany forgiveness; and the first thing is repentance. Repentance is the gift of God, and it is the work of the Holy Ghost in the soul; and a very sacred, sweet, bitter experience it is. True repentance is as deep as true conviction of sin. Be thankful for conviction. Pray, pray for deeper, deeper penetrating conviction of sin, and if the Holy Ghost convinces you of sin, it will penetrate to the very core of your being, to the very core of your hearts, reach to your consciences; it will indeed.

There is a preparation for forgiveness: divine teaching of the malady. How many sinners are there here, ruined sinners, who feel the inward corruptions of their heart? My friends, I feel that my whole being is impregnated with sin, and there is not a fibre that is not contaminated. I do. Repentance will be as deep. Blessed be God, the Gospel is deeper. Deeper than sin? Yes. It underbottoms it; it is higher. A hymn just comes to my mind, one of the sweetest hymns on forgiveness:

*"Tis the rich gift of love divine;
'Tis full" (think of it!) 'Tis full, outmeasuring every crime;
Unclouded shall its glories shine,
And feel no change by changing time.*

*O'er sins unnumbered as the sand,
And like the mountains for their size,
The seas of sovereign grace expand,
The seas of sovereign grace arise."*

(T Gibbons; Gadsby's 755)

If ever these streams flow into your heart, and you see that they can rise above all the mountains of your sins, and outmeasure every crime, it will be attractive to you. Oh, said David, in the depths, "There is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared" (Ps. 130 v. 4). Now this forgiveness, and He who has procured forgiveness, is preached in the Gospel; and the greatest Scripture in the Word of God concerning how this was done is this: "He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5 v. 21). O repenting sinner, lift up your heads! O sin-stung sinner, bitten sinner, look at Calvary! "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness" (John 3 v. 14), so see the Lord Jesus lifted up.

"Dying sinners, look and live."

(J Hart; Gadsby's 876)

But it was those that were bitten, those that were stung. It is the bite; it is the sting of sin, and that which kills gives faith to look at that which makes alive, to see One greater than the devil, to see a righteousness that can cover from every folly, every fault.

'That they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance.' Oh, what riches there are in this text and preached in the Gospel! They are the unsearchable riches of Christ. 'That they might receive inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me.'

Well, if you divide this text into two, you will see the blessedness of it. In the first part of it, it is what they are turned *from*; in the second part of it, it is what they are turned *to*. Have you ever felt that? Oh, says Paul, "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark" (Phil. 3 v. 13-4) — I press toward that Redeemer. "My soul followeth hard after" Him (Ps. 63 v. 8). So that they 'receive ... inheritance among them which are sanctified.' This inheritance is ultimately heaven, "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away" (1 Pet. 1 v. 4) — heaven, and reserved there. Nobody else will take it. It is a reserved inheritance for every one for whom the Lord Jesus has gone to prepare a place. But there is an inheritance here, not different in its nature. Oh, how sweet His entertainments are! What is the inheritance that they receive? It is the inheritance of the kingdom of grace, the inheritance of the Gospel, the inheritance of all the works of the Holy Ghost in the heart, and His sacred influence in the soul wherever the prayer of faith brings down eternal favours and blessings into the soul. Living a pilgrim's life, living above the world - "the way of life is above to the wise" (Prov. 15 v. 24)

– the spiritual mind lives above the things that are carnal. ‘An inheritance’ – to possess all that the Word of truth declares, to possess Christ in His finished work even here below, to receive Him as wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, to possess all that the Gospel contains – and it belongs to His people, and they receive the work of the ministry. What an inheritance it is!

I would not speak lightly, my friends, but there have been times – I can remember and see now an old barn near Flimwell in Sussex, where I had a piece of bread and cheese and the blessing of the Lord in my soul. Yes, it is an inheritance, a rich inheritance, for that that Christ is and has promised to His people: “All things are yours ... because ye are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s” (1 Cor. 3 v. 21-3).

An ‘inheritance among them which are sanctified’ – sanctified first by God the Father, as Jude was “sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called” (Jude v. 1). But they are sanctified also by the Holy Spirit’s inward sanctifying grace at regeneration. To be sanctified is to be set apart for a special use, and this sanctification is the Lord inwardly forming His people for Himself, making them fit for Himself. His finished redemption work has given them a right to heaven; the work of the Holy Ghost in sanctifying them makes them fit to be there, and oh, what a work it is, what a crucifying work it is! This is the work of sanctification: “tribulation worketh patience; and patience experience; and experience, hope, and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in the hearts by the Holy Ghost” (Rom. 5 v. 3). Oh to find everything sanctified, so that “all things work together for good” (Rom. 6 v. 28)! Sanctification is in the furnace: “I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried; they shall call on My name.” Yes, the fire will make them call on His name. “They poured out a prayer when Thy chastening was upon them” (Is. 26 v. 16). “They shall call on My name, and I will hear them; I will say, It is My people; they shall say, The Lord is my God” (Zech. 13 v. 9).

But we have the Ordinance. Oh may the Lord grant that His Word may not return void, but that it may accomplish that which He pleases (Is. 55 v. 11) – and that it might please Him to accomplish that salvation in the hearts of sinners.

Amen.